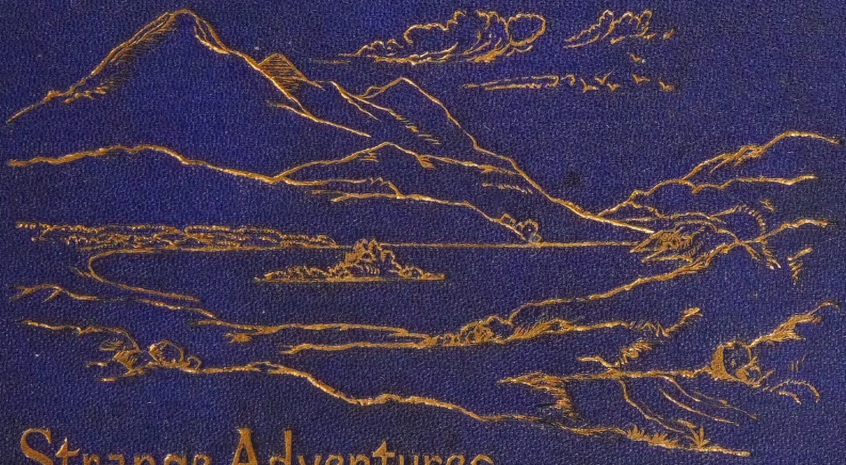

# Strange Adventures of a Phaeton

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IN RICHMOND PARK. *Front.*

THE

# STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A PHAETON.

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF "A DAUGHTER OF HÉTH," ETC. ETC.

*ILLUSTRATED BY S. E. WALLER.*

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LONDON:
R. CLAY, SONS, AND TAYLOR, PRINTERS,
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*To*

*E. W. S.*

*I look back on a journey which was made pleasant by the fancy that you might have been with me; I look forward to another and longer journey rendered beautiful by the hope that you may be with me; and I find this book between. What can I do with it but lay it at your feet, and ask you, as you look over its pages, and smile at the distorted vision of yourself you may find there, to forgive the rude and graceless outlines that were meant to portray one of the most innocent, tender, and beautiful souls God has ever given to the world? The blind man, who has never seen the stars, dreams of them, and is happy. And if he should be cured of his blindness, and get to know the stars and become familiar with all the majesty and wonder of them, will he look with much contempt on those imperfect pictures of them he had formed in the time of his loneliness and ignorance? I think not; and that is the excuse I have for offering to you this book, knowing that you will look charitably on these gropings in the dark, for the sake of the love and admiration that prompted them.*

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# THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A PHAETON.

## CHAPTER I.

### OUR BELL.

"Oh, the oak, and the ash, and the bonny ivy-tree,
They grow so green in the North Countrie!"

It was all settled one evening in the deep winter time. Outside, a sharp east wind was whistling round the solitudes of Box Hill; the Mole, at the foot of our garden, as it stole stealthily through the darkness, crackled the flakes of ice that lay along its level banks; and away on Mickleham Downs—and on the further uplands towards the sea—the cold stars were shining down on a thin coating of snow.

Indoors there was another story to tell; for the mistress of the house—Queen Titania, as we call her—a small person, with a calm, handsome, pale face, an abundance of black hair, big eyes that are occasionally somewhat cold and critical in look, and a certain magnificence of manner which makes you fancy her rather a tall and stately woman—has a trick of so filling her drawing-room with dexterous traceries of grass and ferns, with plentiful flowers of her own rearing, and with a crowded glare of light, that, amid

the general warmth, the glow and perfume, and variety of brilliant colours, you would almost forget that the winter is chill and desolate and dark.

Then Bell, our guest and companion for many a year, lends herself to the deception; for the wilful young person, though there were a dozen inches of snow on the meadows, would come down to dinner in a dress of blue, with touches of white gossamer and fur about the tight wrists and neck—with a white rose and a bunch of forget-me-nots, as blue as her eyes, twisted into the soft masses of her light-brown hair, and with a certain gay and careless demeanour, meant to let us know that she, having been born and bred in the North Country, has a fine contempt for the mild rigours of our southern winter.

But on this particular evening, Bell—our Bell, our Bonny Bell, our Lady Bell, as she is variously called when she provokes people into giving her pet names—had been sitting for a long time with an open book on her knee; and as this volume was all about the English lakes, and gave pictures of them, and placed here and there little tail-pieces of ferns and blossoms, she may have been driven to contrast the visions thus conjured up with the realities suggested by the fierce gusts of wind that were blowing coldly through the box-trees outside. All at once she placed the volume gently on the white hearth-rug, and said, with a strange wistfulness shining in the deeps of her blue eyes,—

"Tita, cannot you make us talk about the summer, and drown the noise of that dreadful wind? Why don't we conspire to cheat the winter and make believe it is summer again? Doesn't it seem to be years and years ago since we had the long light evenings; the walks between the hedge-rows, the waiting for the moon, up on the crest of the hill, and then the quiet stroll downward into the valley and home again, with the wild roses, and the meadow-sweet, and the evening campions filling the warm night air? Come, let us sit close together, and make it summer! See, Tita!—it is a bright forenoon—you can nearly catch

a glimpse of the Downs above Brighton—and we are going to shut up the house, and go away anywhere for a whole month. Round comes that dear old mail-phaeton, and my pair of bonny bays are whinnying for a bit of sugar. Papa is sulky——"

"As usual," remarks my Lady, without lifting her eyes from the carpet.

"——for though the imperial has been slung on, there is scarcely enough room for the heaps of our luggage, and, like every man, he has a deadly hatred of bonnet-boxes. Then you take your seat, my dear, looking like a small empress in a grey travelling dress; and Papa—after pretending to have inspected all the harness—takes the reins; I pop in behind, for the hood, when it is turned down, makes such a pleasant cushion for your arms, and you can stick your sketch-book into it, and a row of apples and anything else; and Sandy touches his forelock, and Kate bobs a curtsy, and away and away we go! How sweet and fresh the air is, Tita! and don't you smell the honeysuckle in the hedge? Why, here we are at Dorking! Papa pulls up to grumble about the last beer that was sent; and then Castor and Pollux toss up their heads again, and on we drive to Guildford, and to Reading, and to Oxford. And all through England we go, using sometimes the old coaching-roads, and sometimes the by-roads, stopping at the curious little inns, and chatting to the old country folks and singing ballads of an evening as we sit upon the hillsides, and watch the partridges dusting themselves below us in the road; and then on and on again. Is not that the sea, Tita?—look at the long stretch of Morecambe Bay and the yellow sands, and the steamers on the horizon! But all at once we dive into the hills again, and we come to the old familiar places by Applethwaite and Ambleside, and then some evening—some evening, Tita—we come in sight of Grasmere, and then—and then——"

"Why, Bell!—what is the matter with you?" cries the other, and the next minute her arms are round the

light-brown head, crushing its white rose and its blue forget-me-nots.

"If you two young creatures," it is remarked, "would seriously settle where we are to go next summer, you would be better employed than in rubbing your heads together like a couple of baby calves."

"Settle!" says Lady Tita, with a smile of gentle impertinence on her face; "we know who is allowed to settle things in this house. If we were to settle anything, some wonderful discovery would be made about the horses' feet, or the wheels of that valuable phaeton which was made, I should fancy, about the time the owner of it was born——"

"The wife who mocks at her husband's grey hairs," I remark calmly, "knowing the share she has had in producing them——"

Here our Bonny Bell interfered, and a truce was concluded. The armistice was devoted to consideration of Bell's project, which at length it was resolved to adopt. Why, after going year after year round the southern counties in that big, old-fashioned phaeton which had become as a house to us, should we not strike fairly northward? These circles round the south would resemble the swinging of a stone in the sling before it is projected; and, once we were started on this straight path, who could tell how far we might not go?

"Then," said I,—for our thoughts at this time were often directed to the great masses of men who were marching through the wet valleys of France, or keeping guard amid cold and fog in the trenches around Paris,—"suppose that by July next the war may be over,—Count Von Rosen says he means to pay us a visit, and have a look at England. Why should not he join our party, and become a companion for Bell?"

I had inadvertently probed a hornets' nest. The women of our household were at that time bitter against the Germans; and but half an hour before Bell herself had been eloquently denouncing the doings of the Prussians. Had they not in secrecy been preparing

to steal back Alsace and Lorraine; had they not taken advantage of the time when the good and gentle France was averse from war to provoke a quarrel; had not the King openly insulted the French Ambassador in the promenade at Ems; and had not their hordes of men swarmed into the quiet villages, slaying and destroying, robbing the poor and aged, and winning battles by mere force of numbers? Besides, the suggestion that this young lieutenant of cavalry might be a companion for Bell appeared to be an intentional injury done to a certain amiable young gentleman, of no particular prospects, living in the Temple; and so Bell forthwith declared her dislike not only of the German officers, but of all officers whatsoever.

"And as for Count Von Rosen," she said, "I can remember him at Bonn only as a very rude and greedy boy, who showed a great row of white teeth when he laughed, and made bad jokes about my mistakes in German. And now I dare say he is a tall fellow, with a stiff neck, a brown face, perhaps a beard, a clanking sword, and the air of a Bobadil, as he stalks into an inn and calls out, '*Kellnare! eene Pulle Sect! und sagen Sie mal, was haben Sie für Zeitungen—die Alljemeene?*'"

I ventured to point out to Bell that she might alter her opinion when Von Rosen actually came over with all the glamour of a hero about him; and that, indeed, she could not do better than marry him.

Bell opened her eyes.

"Marry him, because he is a hero! No! I would not marry a hero, after he had become a hero. It would be something to marry a man who was afterwards to become great, and be with him all the time of his poverty and his struggles. That would be worth something—to comfort him when he was in despair, to be kind to him when he was suffering; and then, when it was all over, and he had got his head above these troubles, he would say to you, 'Oh, Kate, or Nell,' as your name might be, 'how good you were during the old time when we were poor and friendless!' But when he has become a hero, he thinks he will overawe you

with the shadow of his great reputation. He thinks he has only to come, and hold out the tips of his fingers, and say, 'I am a great person. Everybody worships me. I will allow you to share my brilliant fortune, and you will dutifully kiss me.' *Merci, monsieur!* but if any man were to come to me like that, I would answer him as Canning's knife-grinder was answered—'I give you kisses? I will see you——'"

"Bell!" cried my Lady peremptorily.

Bell stopped, and then blushed, and dropped her eyes.

"What is one to do," she asked, meekly, "when a quotation comes in?"

"You used to be a good girl," said Queen Tita, in her severest manner, "but you are becoming worse and worse every day. I hear you sing the refrains of horrid street songs. Your love of sitting up at night is dreadful. The very maid-servants are shocked by your wilful provincialisms. And you treat me, for whom you ought to show some respect, with a levity and familiarity without example. I will send a report of your behaviour to——".

And here the look of mischief in Bell's eyes—which had been deepening just as you may see the pupil of a cat widening before she makes a spring—suddenly gave way to a glance of urgent and meek entreaty, which was recognized in the proper quarter. Tita named no names; and the storm blew over.

For the present, therefore, the project of adding this young Uhlan to our party was dropped; but the idea of our northward trip remained, and gradually assumed definite consistency. Indeed, as it developed itself during those long winter evenings, it came to be a thing to dream about. But all the same I could see that Tita sometimes returned to the notion of providing a companion for Bell; and, whatever may have been her dislike of the Germans in general, Lieutenant von Rosen was not forgotten. At odd times, when

> "In her hazel eyes her thoughts lay clear
> As pebbles in a brook,"

it seemed to me that she was busy with those forecasts which are dear to the hearts of women. One night we three were sitting as quietly as usual, talking about something else, when she suddenly remarked—

"I suppose that Count von Rosen is as poor as Prussian lieutenants generally are?"

"On the contrary," said I, "he enjoys a very handsome *Familien-Stiftung*, or family bequest, which gives him a certain sum of money every six months, on condition that during that time he has either travelled so much or gone through such and such a course of study. I wish the legacies left in our country had sometimes those provisions attached."

"He has some money, then," said my Lady, thoughtfully.

"My dear," said I, "you seem to be very anxious about the future, like the man whose letter I read to you yesterday.[1] Have you any further questions to ask?"

"I suppose he cares for nothing but eating and drinking and smoking, like other officers? He has not been troubled by any very great sentimental crisis?"

"On the contrary," I repeated, "he wrote me a despairing letter, some fortnight before the war broke out, about that same Fräulein Fallersleben whom we saw acting in the theatre at Hanover. She had treated him very badly—she had——"

"Oh, that is all nothing," said Tita hastily—and here she glanced rather nervously at Bell.

Bell, for her part, was unconcernedly fitting a pink collar on a white cat, and talking to that pretty but unresponsive animal.

[1] This is the letter :—

"To the Editor of the *Hampshire Ass.*

"Sir,—If the Republicans who are endeavouring to introduce a Republic into this great country should accomplish their disgusting purpose, do you think they will repudiate the National Debt, and pay no more interest on the Consols?

"I am, Sir,

"Your obedient Servant,

"Bogmere, *Jan.* 18, 1871." "A Lover of Mankind.

"He left her," I remarked again, "in paroxysms of anger and mutual reproach. He accused her of having——"

"Well, well, that will do," says Queen Titania, in her coldest manner; and then, of course, everybody obeys the small woman.

That was the last that was heard of Von Rosen for many a day; and it was not until some time after the war was over that he favoured us with a communication. He was still in France. He hoped to get over to England at the end of July; and as that was the time we had fixed for our journey from London to Edinburgh, along the old coach-roads, he became insensibly mixed up with the project, until it was finally resolved to ask him to join the party.

"I know you mean to marry these two," I said to the person who rules over us all.

"How absurd you are," she replied, with a vast assumption of dignity. "Bell is as good as engaged —even if there was any fear of a handsome young Englishwoman falling in love with a Prussian lieutenant who is in despair about an actress."

"You had better take a wedding-ring with you."

"A wedding-ring!" said Tita, with a little curl of her lips. "You fancy that a girl thinks of nothing but that. Every wedding-ring that is worn represents a man's impertinence and a woman's folly."

"Ask Bell," said I.

## CHAPTER II.

### A LUNCHEON IN HOLBORN.

"From the bleak coast that hears
The German Ocean roar, deep-blooming, strong,
And yellow-haired, the blue-eyed Saxon came."

No more fitting point of departure could have been chosen than the Old Bell Inn in Holborn, an ancient hostelry which used in bygone times to send its relays

of stage-coaches to Oxford, Cheltenham, Enfield, Abingdon, and a score of other places. Now, from the quaint little yard, which is surrounded by frail and dilapidated galleries of wood, that tell of the grandeur of other days, there starts but a solitary omnibus, which daily whisks a few country people and their parcels down to Uxbridge, and Chalfont, and Amersham, and Wendover. The vehicle which Mr. Thoroughgood has driven for many a year is no magnificent blue and scarlet drag, with teams costing six hundred guineas apiece, with silver harness, a post-boy blowing a silver horn, and a lord handling the reins; but a rough and serviceable little coach which is worked for profit, and which is of vast convenience to the folks living in quiet Buckinghamshire villages apart from railways. From this old-fashioned inn, now that the summer had come round, and our long-looked-for journey to the North had come near, we had resolved to start; and Bell having gravely pointed out the danger of letting our young Uhlan leave London hungry—lest habit should lead him to seize something by the way, and so get us into trouble—it was further proposed that we should celebrate our setting-out with a luncheon of good roast beef and ale, in the snug little parlour which abuts on the yard.

"And I hope," said Queen Titania, as we escaped from the roar of Holborn into the archway of the inn, "that the stupid fellow has got himself decently dressed. Otherwise, we shall be mobbed."

The fact was that Count von Rosen, not being aware that English officers rarely appear when off duty in uniform, had come straight from St. Denis to Calais, and from Calais to London, and from London to Leatherhead, without ever dreaming that he ought not to go about in his regimentals. He drew no distinction between Herr Graf von Rosen and Seiner Majestät Lieutenant im —ten Uhlanen-Regimente; although he told us that when he issued from his hotel at Charing Cross to get into a cab, he was surprised to see a small crowd collect around the hansom, and no less surprised to observe the absence of military costume in the

streets. Of course, the appearance of an Uhlan in the quiet village of Leatherhead caused a profound commotion; and had not Castor and Pollux been able to distance the crowd of little boys who flocked around him at the station, it is probable he would have arrived at our house attended by that concourse of admirers.

You should have seen the courteous and yet half-defiant way in which the women received him, as if they were resolved not to be overawed by the tall, browned, big-bearded man; and how, in about twenty minutes, they had insensibly got quite familiar with him, apparently won over by his careless laughter, by the honest stare of his light-blue eyes, and by a very boyish blush that sometimes overspread his handsome face when he stammered over an idiom, or was asked some question about his own exploits. Bell remained the most distant; but I could see that our future companion had produced a good impression on my Lady, for she began to take the management of him, and to give him counsel in a minute and practical manner, which is a sure mark of her favour. She told him he must put aside his uniform while in England. She described to him the ordinary costume worn by English gentlemen in travelling. And then she hoped he would take a preparation of quinine with him, considering that we should have to stay in a succession of strange inns, and might be exposed to damp.

He went up to London that night, armed with a list of articles which he was to buy for himself before starting with us.

There was a long pause when we three found ourselves together again. At length Bell said, with rather an impatient air—

"He is only a schoolboy, after all. Why should he continue to call you *Madame*, and me *Mademoiselle*, just as he did when he knew us first at Bonn, and gave us these names as a joke? Then he has the same irritating habit of laughing that he used to have there. I hate a man who has his mouth always open—like a

swallow in the air, trying to catch anything that may come. And he is worse, I think, when he closes his lips and tries to give himself an intellectual look, like—like——"

"Like what, Bell?"

"Like a calf posing itself, and trying to look like a red deer," said Bell with a sort of contemptuous warmth.

"I wish, Bell," said my Lady, coldly and severely, "that you would give up those rude metaphors. You talk just as you did when you came fresh from Westmoreland—you have learnt nothing."

Bell's only answer was to walk, with rather a proud air, to the piano, and there she sat down and played a few bars. She would not speak; but the well-known old air spoke for her, for it said, as plain as words could say—

> "A North Country maid up to London had strayed,
> Although with her nature it did not agree;
> She wept, and she sighed, and she bitterly cried,
> 'I wish once again in the North I could be!'"

"I think," continued Tita, in measured tones, "that he is a very agreeable and trustworthy young man—not very polished, perhaps; but then he is a German. I look forward with great interest to see in what light our English country life will strike him; and I hope, Bell, that he will not have to complain of the want of courtesy shown him by Englishwomen."

This was getting serious; so, being to some small and undefined extent master in my own house, I commanded Bell to sing the song she was petulantly strumming. That "fetched" Tita. Whenever Bell began to sing one of those old English ballads, which she did for the most part from morning till night, there was a strange and tremulous thrill in her voice that would have disarmed her bitterest enemy; and straightway my Lady would be seen to draw over to the girl, and put her arm round her shoulder, and then reward her, when the last chord of the accompaniment had been struck, with a grateful kiss. In the present instance, the charm

worked as usual; but no sooner had these two young people been reconciled than they turned on their mutual benefactor. Indeed, an observant stranger might have remarked in this household, that when anything remotely bearing on a quarrel was made up between any two of its members, the third, the peacemaker, was expected to propose a dinner at Greenwich. The custom would have been more becoming had the cost been equally distributed; but there were three losers to one payer.

Well, when we got into the yard of the Old Bell the Buckinghamshire omnibus was being loaded; and among the first objects we saw was the stalwart figure of Von Rosen, who was talking to Mr. Thoroughgood, as if he had known him all his life, and examining with a curious and critical eye the construction and accommodation of the venerable old vehicle. We saw with some satisfaction that he was now dressed in a suit of grey garments, with a wide-awake hat; and, indeed, there was little to distinguish him from an Englishman but the curious blending of colour—from the tawny yellow of his moustache to the deep brown of his cropped beard—which is seldom absent from the hirsute decoration of a Prussian face.

He came forward with a grave and ceremonious politeness to Queen Titania, who received him in her dignified, quaint, maternal fashion; and he shook hands with Bell with an obviously unconscious air of indifference. Then, not noticing her silence, he talked to her, after we had gone inside, of the old-fashioned air of homeliness and comfort noticeable in the inn, of the ancient portraits, and the quaint fireplace, and the small busts placed about. Bell seemed rather vexed that he should address himself to her, and uttered scarcely a word in reply.

But when our plain and homely meal was served, this restraint gradually wore away; and in the talk over our coming adventures, Bell abandoned herself to all sorts of wild anticipations. She forgot the presence of the German lieutenant. Her eyes were fixed on the

North Country, and on summer nights up amid the Westmoreland hills, and on bright mornings up by the side of the Scotch lochs; and while the young soldier looked gravely at her, and even seemed a trifle surprised, she told us of all the dreams and visions she had had of the journey, for weeks and months back, and how the pictures of it had been with her night and day until she was almost afraid the reality would not bear them out. Then she described—as if she were gifted with second sight—the various occupations we should have to follow during the long afternoons in the North; and how she had brought her guitar that Queen Titania might sing Spanish songs to it; and how we listen to the corn-crake; and how she would make studies of all the favourite places we came to, and perhaps might even construct a picture of our phaeton and Castor and Pollux—with a background of half-a-dozen counties—for some exhibition; and how, some day in the far future, when the memory of our long excursion had grown dim, Tita would walk into a room in Pall Mall, and there, with the picture before her, would turn round with wonder in her eyes, as if it were a revelation.

"Because," said Bell, turning seriously to the young Uhlan, and addressing him as though she had talked familiarly to him for years, "you mustn't suppose that our Tita is anything but a hypocrite. All her coldness and affectation of grandeur are only a pretence; and sometimes, if you watch her eyes—and she is not looking at you—you will see something come up to the surface of them as if it were her real heart and soul there, looking out in wonder and softness at some beautiful thing—just like a dabchick, you know, when you are watching among bushes by a river, and are quite still; and then, if you make the least remark, if you rustle your dress, snap! down goes the dabchick, and you see nothing, and my Lady turns to you quite proudly and coldly—though there may be tears in her eyes—and dares you to think that she has shown any emotion."

"That is, when she is listening to you singing?" said the Lieutenant, gravely and politely; and at this moment Bell seemed to become conscious that we were all amused by her vehemence, blushed prodigiously, and was barely civil to our Uhlan for half an hour after.

Nevertheless, she had every reason to be in a good humour; for we had resolved to limit our travels that day to Twickenham, where, in the evening, Tita was to see her two boys who were at school there. And as the young gentleman of the Temple, who has already been briefly mentioned in this narrative, is a son of the schoolmaster with whom the boys were then living, and as he was to be of the farewell party assembled in Twickenham at night, Bell had no unpleasant prospect before her for that day at least. And of one thing she was probably by that time thoroughly assured; no fires of jealousy were in danger of being kindled in any sensitive breast by the manner of Count von Rosen towards her. Of course he was very courteous and obliging to a pretty young woman; but he talked almost exclusively to my Lady; while, to state the plain truth, he seemed to pay more attention to his luncheon than to both of them together.

Behold, then, our phaeton ready to start! The pair of pretty bays are pawing the hard stones and pricking their ears at the unaccustomed sounds of Holborn. Sandy is at their head, regarding them rather dolefully as if he feared to let them slip from his care to undertake so long and perilous a voyage; Queen Titania has arranged that she shall sit behind, to show the young Prussian all the remarkable things on our route; and Bell, as she gets up in front, begs to have the reins given her so soon as we get away from the crowded thoroughfares. There are still a few loiterers on the pavement who had assembled to see the Wendover omnibus leave; and these regard with a languid sort of curiosity the setting-out of the party in the big dark-green phaeton.

A little tossing of heads and prancing, a little adjustment of the reins, and a final look round, and then

we glide into the wild and roaring stream of vehicles —that mighty current of rolling vans, and heavy waggons, and crowded Bayswater omnibuses, of dexterous hansoms and indolent four-wheelers, of brewers' drays and post-office carts and costermongers' barrows. Over the great thoroughfare, with its quaint and huddled houses and its innumerable shops, dwell a fine blue sky and white clouds that seem oddly discoloured. The sky, seen through a curious pall of mist and smoke, is only grey, and the clouds are distant and dusky and yellow, like those of an old landscape that has lain for years in a broker's shop. Then there is a faint glow of sunlight shining along the houses on the northern side of the street; and here and there the window of some lobster-shop or tavern glints back the light. As we get farther westward, the sky overhead gets clearer, and the character of the thoroughfare alters. Here we are at the street leading up to the British Museum—a Mudie and a Moses on each hand—and it would almost seem as if the Museum had sent out rays of influence to create around it a series of smaller collections. In place of the humble fishmonger and the familiar hosier, we have owners of large windows filled with curious treasures of art—old-fashioned jewellery, china, knick-knacks of furniture, silver spoons and kettles, and stately portraits of the time of Charles II., in which the women have all beaded black eyes, yellow curls, and a false complexion, while the men are fat, pompous, and wigged. Westward still, and we approach the huge shops and warehouses of Oxford Street, where the last waves of fashionable life, seeking millinery, beat on the eastern barriers that shut out the rest of London. Regent Street is busy on this quiet afternoon; and Bell asks in a whisper whether the countryman of Blücher, now sitting behind us, does not betray in his eyes what he thinks of this vast show of wealth. Listening for a moment, we hear that Queen Titania, instead of talking to him about the shops, is trying to tell him what London was in the last century, and how Colonel Jack and his associates,

before that enterprising youth started to walk from London to Edinburgh to avoid the law, used to waylay travellers in the fields between Gray's Inn and St. Pancras, and how, having robbed a coach between Hyde Park Gate and Knightsbridge, they "went over the fields to Chelsea." This display of erudition on the part of my Lady has evidently been prepared beforehand; for she even goes the length of quoting dates and furnishing a few statistics—a thing which no woman does inadvertently. However, when we get into Pall Mall, her ignorance of the names of the clubs reveals the superficial nature of her acquirements; for even Bell is able to recognize the Reform, assisted, doubtless, by the polished pillars of the Carlton. The women are, of course, eager to know which is the Prince of Wales's Club, and afterwards look with quite a peculiar interest on the brick wall of Marlborough House.

"Now," says our Bonny Bell, as we get into the quiet of St. James's Park, where the trees of the long avenue and the shrubbery around the ponds look quite pleasant and fresh even under the misty London sunlight; "now you must let me have the reins. I am wearying to get away from the houses, and be really on the road to Scotland. Indeed, I shall not feel that we have actually set out until we leave Twickenham, and are fairly on the old coach-road at Hounslow."

I looked at Bell. She did not blush; but calmly waited to take the reins. I had then to point out to the young hypocrite that her wiles were of no avail. She was not anxious to be beyond Twickenham; she was chiefly anxious to get down thither. Notwithstanding that she knew we had chosen a capricious and roundabout road to reach this first stage on our journey, merely to show Von Rosen something of London and its suburban beauties, she was looking with impatience to the long circuit by Clapham Common, Wimbledon, and Richmond Park. Therefore she was not in a condition to be entrusted with the safety of so valuable a freight.

"I am not impatient," said Bell, with her colour a

trifle heightened: "I do not care whether we ever get to Twickenham. I would as soon go to Henley to-night, and to-morrow to Oxford. But it is just like a man to make a great bother and go in prodigious circles to reach a trifling distance. You go circling and circling like the minute-hand of a clock; but the small hand, that takes it easy, and makes no clatter of ticking, finds at twelve o'clock that it has got quite as far as its big companion."

"This, Bell," I remarked, "is impertinence."

"Will you give me the reins?"

"No."

Bell turned half round, and leaned her arm on the lowered hood.

"My dear," she said to Queen Titania—who had been telling the Count something about Buckingham Palace—"we have forgotten one thing. What are we to do when our companions are disagreeable during the day? In the evening we can read, or sing, or walk about by ourselves. But during the day, Tita? When we are imprisoned, how are we to escape?"

"We shall put you in the imperial, if you are not a good girl," said my Lady, with a gracious sweetness; and then she turned to the Count.

It would have been cruel to laugh at Bell. For a minute or two after meeting with this rebuff, she turned rather away from us, and stared with a fine assumption of proud indifference down the Vauxhall Bridge Road. But presently a lurking smile began to appear about the corners of her mouth; and at last she cried out—

"Well, there is no use quarrelling with a married man, for he never pets you. He is familiar with the trick of it, I suppose, and looks on like an old juggler watching the efforts of an amateur. See! how lovely the river is up there by Chelsea—the long reach of rippling grey, the green of the trees, and the curious silvery light that almost hides the heights beyond. We shall see the Thames often, shall we not? and then the Severn, and then the Solway, and then the

great Frith of the Forth? When I think of it, I feel like a bird—a lark fluttering up in happiness—and seeing farther and farther every minute. To see the Solway, you know, you have to be up almost in the blue; and then all around you there rises the wide plain of England, with fields, and woods, and streams. Fancy being able to see as far as a vulture, and to go swooping on for leagues and leagues—now up amid white peaks of snow—or down through some great valley—or across the sea in the sunset. And only fancy that some evening you might find the spectral ship beginning to appear in pale fire in the mist of the horizon—coming on towards you without a sound—do you know, that is the most terrible legend ever thought of!"

"What has a vulture to do with the Flying Dutchman?" said my Lady Tita suddenly; and Bell turned with a start to find her friend's head close to her own. "You are becoming incoherent, Bell, and your eyes are as wild as if you were really looking at the phantom ship. Why are you not driving?"

"Because I am not allowed," said Bell.

However, when we got into the Clapham Road, Bell had her wish. She took her place with the air of a practised whip; and did not even betray any nervousness when a sudden whistle behind us warned her that she was in the way of a tramway-car. Moreover, she managed to subdue so successfully her impatience to get to Twickenham, that she was able to take us in the gentlest manner possible up and across Clapham Common, down through Wandsworth, and up again towards Wimbledon. When, at length, we got to the brow of the hill that overlooks the long and undulating stretches of furze, the admiration of our Prussian friend, which had been called forth by the various parks and open spaces in and around London, almost rose to the pitch of enthusiasm.

"Is it the sea down there, yes?" he asked, looking towards the distant tent-poles, which certainly resembled a small forest of masts in the haze of the

sunshine. "It is not the sea? I almost expect to reach the shore always in England. Yet why have you so beautiful places like this around London—so much more beautiful than the sandy country around our Berlin—and no one to come to it? You have more than three millions of people—here is a playground—why do they not come? And Clapham Common too, it is not used for people to walk in, as we should use it in Germany, and have a pleasant seat in a garden, and the women sewing until their husbands and friends come in the evening, and music to make it pleasant, afterwards. It is nothing—a waste—a landscape—very beautiful—but not used. You have children on donkeys, and boys playing their games—that is very good—but it is not enough. And here, this beautiful park, all thrown away—no one here at all. Why does not your Lord Mayor see the—the requirement—of drawing away large numbers of people from so big a town for fresh air; and make here some amusements?"

"Consider the people who live all around," said my Lady, "and what they would have to suffer."

"Suffer!" said the young Prussian, with his eyes staring; "I do not understand you. For people to walk through gardens, and smoke, and drink a glass or two of beer, or sit under the trees and sew or read—surely that is not offensive to any person. And here the houses are miles away—you cannot see them down beyond the windmill there."

"Did you ever hear of such things as manorial rights, and freeholders, and copyholders, and the Statute of Merton?" he is asked.

"All that is nothing—a fiction," he retorted. "You have a Government in this country representing the people; why not take all these commons and use them for the people? And if the Government has not courage to do that, why do not your municipalities, which are rich, buy up the land, and provide amusements, and draw the people into the open air?"

My Lady Tita could scarce believe her ears on hearing a Prussian aristocrat talk thus coolly of confiscation, and exhibit no more reverence for the traditional rights of property than if he were a Parisian socialist. But then these boys of twenty-five will dance over the world's edge in pursuit of a theory.

Here, too, as Bell gently urged our horses forward towards the crest of the slope leading down to Baveley Bridge, Von Rosen got his first introduction to an English landscape. All around him lay the brown stretches of sand and the blue-green clumps of furze of the common; on either side of the wide and well-made road, the tall banks were laden with a tangled luxuriance of brushwood and bramble and wild-flowers; down in the hollow beneath us there were red-tiled farm-buildings half hid in a green maze of elms and poplars; then the scattered and irregular fields and meadows, scored with hedges and dotted with houses, led up to a series of heights that were wooded with every variety of forest tree; while over all these undulations and plains there lay that faint presence of mist which only served to soften the glow of the afternoon sunshine, and show us the strong colours of the picture through a veil of tender ethereal grey.

We go down the hill, and roll along the valley.

"This is the Robin Hood Gate," says Queen Tita. "Have you heard of Robin Hood, Count von Rosen?"

"Oh yes. He was one of those picturesque men that we have many of in our German stories. We like huntsmen, outlaws, and such people; and the German boys, they do know of Robin Hood as much as of William Tell."

"But then, you know," says Tita, gravely, "Robin Hood was a real person."

"And was not William Tell?"

"They say not."

The Lieutenant laughed.

"Madame," he said, "I did not know you were so learned. But if there was no William Tell, are you sure there was any Robin Hood?"

"Oh, yes, I am quite sure," said my Lady, earnestly; which closed this chapter of profound historical criticism.

Richmond Park, in the stillness of a fine sunset, was worth bringing a foreigner to see. The ruddy light from the west was striking here and there among the glades under the oaks; across the bars of radiance and shadow the handsome little bucks and long-necked does were lightly passing and repassing; while there were rabbits in thousands trotting in and about the brackens, with an occasional covey of young partridges alternately regarding us with upstretched necks and then running off a few yards further. But after we had bowled along the smooth and level road, up and through the avenues of stately oaks, past the small lakes (one of them, beyond the shadow of a dark wood, gleamed like a line of gold), and up to the summit of Richmond Hill, Queen Titania had not a word to say further in pointing out the beauties of the place. She had been officiating as conductor, but it was with the air of a proprietress. Now, as we stopped the phaeton on the crest of the hill, she was silent.

Far away behind us lay the cold green of the eastern sky, and under it the smoke of London lay red and brown, while in the extreme distance we could see dim traces of houses, and down in the south a faint rosy mist. Some glittering yellow rays showed us where the Crystal Palace, high over the purple shadows of Sydenham, caught the sunlight; and up by Notting Hill, too, there were one or two less distinct glimmerings of glass. But when we turned to the west, no such range of vision was permitted to us. All over the bed of the river there lay across the western sky a confused glare of pale gold—not a distinct sunset, with sharp lines of orange and blood-red fire, but a bewildering haze that blinded the eyes and was rather ominous for the morrow. Along the horizon,

> "where, enthroned in adamantine state,
> Proud of her bards, imperial Windsor sits,"

there was no trace of the grey towers to be made out but a confused and level mass of silver streaks, and lines of blue. Nearer at hand, the spacious and wooded landscape seemed almost dark under the glare of the sky; and the broad windings of the Thames lay white and clear between the soft green of the Twickenham shores and the leafy masses of "umbrageous Ham."

"Doesn't it seem as though the strange light away up there in the north and out in the west lay over some unknown country," said Bell, with her eyes filled with the glamour of the sunset, "and that to-morrow we were to begin our journey into a great prairie, and leave houses and people for ever behind us? You can see no more villages, but only miles and miles of woods and plains, until you come to a sort of silver mist, and that might be the sea."

"And a certain young lady stands on the edge of this wild and golden desert, and a melancholy look comes into her eyes. For she is fond of houses and her fellow-creatures, and here, just close at hand—down there, in Twickenham, in fact—there is a comfortable dining-room and some pleasant friends, and one attentive person in particular, who is perhaps a little sorry to bid her good-bye. Yet she does not falter. To-morrow morning she will hold out her hand—a tender and wistful smile will only half convey her sadness——"

Here Bell rapidly but lightly touched Pollux with the whip; both the horses sprang forward with a jerk that had nearly thrown the Lieutenant into the road (for he was standing up and holding on by the hood); and then, without another word, she rattled us down into Richmond. Getting sharply round the corner, she pretty nearly had a wheel taken off by the omnibus that was standing in front of the King's Head, and just escaped knocking down a youth in white costume and boating shoes, who jumped back on the pavement with an admirable dexterity. Nor would she stop to give us a look at the Thames

from the bridge—we only caught a glimpse of the broad bend of the water, the various boats and their white-clad crews, the pleasant river-paths, and the green and wooded heights all around. She swept us on along the road leading into Twickenham, past the abodes of the Orleanist Princes, and into the narrow streets of the village itself, until, with a proud and defiant air, she pulled the horses up in front of Dr. Ashburton's house.

There *was* a young man at the window. She pretended not to see him.

When the servants had partly got our luggage out, the young man made his appearance, and came forward, in rather a frightened way, as I thought, to pay his respects to my Lady Tita and Bell. Then he glanced at the Uhlan, who was carefully examining the horses' fetlocks and hoofs. Finally, as the Doctor had no stables, Master Arthur informed us that he had made arrangements about putting up the horses; and while the rest of us went into the house, he volunteered to take the phaeton round to the inn. He and the Count went off together.

Then there was a wild commotion on the first landing, a confused tumble and rush down stairs, and presently Bell and Tita were catching up two boys and hugging them, and pulling out all sorts of mysterious presents.

"Heh! how fens tee, Jeck? gaily?" cried Auntie Bell, whose broad Cumberlandshire vastly delighted the youngsters. "Why, Twom, thou's growin' a big lad,—thou mud as weel be a sodger as at schuil. Can tee dance a whornpipe yet?—what, nowther o' ye? Dost think I's gaun to gie a siller watch to twa feckless fallows that canna dance a whornpipe?"

But here Bell's mouth was stopped by a multitude of kisses, and, having had to confess that the two silver watches were really in her pocket, she was drawn into the parlour by the two boys, and made to stand and deliver.

## CHAPTER III.

### "PRINZ EUGEN, DER EDLE RITTER."

"What can Tommy Onslow do?
He can drive a phaeton and two.
Can Tommy Onslow do no more?"

MEANWHILE, what had become of the Lieutenant and Arthur, and Castor and Pollux, to say nothing of the phaeton, which had now been transferred from its accustomed home in Surrey to spend a night under a shed in Twickenham? The crooked by-ways and narrow streets of that curious little village were getting rapidly darker under the falling dusk, and here and there orange lamps were beginning to shine in the blue-grey of the twilight, when I set out to discover the stable to which our horses had been confided. I had got but half-way to the public-house, when I met Arthur. The ordinarily mild and gentle face of this young man—which would be quite feminine in character, but for a soft, pale-yellow moustache—looked rather gloomy.

"Where is the Count?" I asked of him.

"Do you mean that German fellow?" he said.

The poor young man! It was easy to detect the cause of that half-angry contempt with which he spoke of our Lieutenant. It was jealousy with its green eyes and dark imaginings; and the evening, I could see, promised us a pretty spectacle of the farce of Bell and the Dragon. At present I merely requested Master Arthur to answer my question.

"Well," said he, with a fine expression of irony—the unhappy wretch! as if it were not quite obvious that he was more inclined to cry—"if you want to keep him out of the police-office, you'd better go down to the stables of the ——. He has raised a pretty quarrel there, I can tell you—kicked the ostler half

across the yard—knocked heaps of things to smithereens—and is ordering everybody about, and fuming and swearing in a dozen different inarticulate languages. I wish you joy of your companion. You will have plenty of adventures by the way; but what will you do with all the clocks you gather?"

"Go home, you stupid boy, and thank God you have not the gift of sarcasm. Bell is waiting for you. You will talk very sensibly to her, I daresay; but don't make any jokes—not for some years to come."

Arthur went his way into the twilight, as wretched a young man as there was that evening in Twickenham.

Now in front of the public-house, and adjoining the entrance into the yard, a small and excited crowd had collected of all the idlers and loungers who hang about the doors of a tavern. In the middle of them—as you could see when the yellow light from the window streamed through a chink in the cluster of human figures—there was a small, square-set, bandy-legged man, with a red waistcoat, a cropped head, and a peaked cap, with the peak turned sideways. He was addressing his companions alternately in an odd mixture of Buckinghamshire *patois* and Middlesex pronunciation, somewhat in this fashion:—

"I baint afeard of 'm, or any other darned furrener, the ——. An' I've looked arter awsses afore he wur born, and I'd like to see the mahn as 'll tell me what I don't know about 'm. I've kept my plaäce for fifteen yur, and I'll bet the coöt on my bahck as my missus 'll say, there niver wur a better in the plaäce; an' as fur thaht —— furrener in there, the law 'll teach him summut, or I'm werry much mistaken. Eh, Arry? Bain't I right?"

This impassioned appeal from the excited small man was followed by a general chorus of assent.

I made my way down the yard, between the shafts of dog-carts, and the poles of disabled omnibuses that loomed from out the darkness of a long and low shed. Down at the foot of this narrow and dusky channel

a stable-door was open, and the faint yellow light occasionally caught the figure of a man who was busy grooming a horse outside. As I picked my way over the rough stones, I could hear that he was occasionally interrupting the hissing noise peculiar to the work with a snatch of a song, carelessly sung in a deep and sufficiently powerful voice. What was it he sang?

"*Prinz Eugen, der edle Ritter*——hisssssss——*wollt' dem Kaiser wiedrum kriegen*——wo! my beauty—so ho!——*Stadt und Festung Belgarad!*——hold up, my lad! wo ho!"

"Hillo, Oswald, what are you about?"

"Oh, only looking after the horses," said our young Uhlan, slowly raising himself up.

He was in a remarkable state of undress—his coat, waistcoat, and collar having been thrown on the straw inside the stable—and he held in his hand a brush.

"The fellows at this inn they are very ignorant of horses, or very careless."

"I hear you have been kicking 'em all about the place."

"Why not? You go in to have a glass of beer and see the people. You come back to the stables. The man says he has fed the horses—it is a lie. He says he has groomed them—it is a lie. *Jott in Himmel!* can I not see? Then I drive him away—I take out corn for myself, also some beans—he comes back—he is insolent—I fling him into the yard—he falls over the pail—he lies and groans—that is very good for him; it will teach him to mind his business, not to tell lies, and to steal the price of the corn."

I pointed out to this cool young person that if he went kicking insolent ostlers all over the country, he would get us into trouble.

"Is it not a shame they do not know their work? and that they will ruin good horses to steal a sixpence from you, yes?"

"Besides," I said, "it is not prudent to quarrel with an ostler, for you must leave your horses under

his care; and if he should be ill-natured, he may do them a mischief during the night."

The Count laughed, as he untied the halter and led Pollux into a loose box.

"Do not be alarmed. I never allow any man to lock up my horses if I am among strangers. I do that myself. I will lock up this place and take the key, and to-morrow at six I will come round and see them fed. No! you must not object. It is a great pleasure of mine to look after horses, and I shall become friends with these two in a very few days. You must let me manage them always."

"And groom them twice a day?"

"*Nee, Jott bewahre!* When there is a man who can do it, I will not; but when there is no one, it is a very good thing to help yourself."

Lieutenant Oswald von Rosen had clearly learned how to conjugate the verb *requiriren* during his sojourn in Bohemia and in France. He made another raid on the corn and split beans, got up into the loft, and crammed down plenty of hay, and then bringing a heap of clean straw into the place, tossed it plentifully about the loose box devoted to Pollux, and about Castor's stall. Then he put on his upper vestments, brought away the candle, locked the door, and put the key in his pocket, humming all the time something about "*die dreimal hunderttausend Mann.*"

When we had got to the gate of the yard, he stalked up to the small crowd of idlers, and said—

"Which of you is the man who did tumble over the pail? Is it you, you little fellow? Well, you deserve much more than you got, yes; but here is a half-crown for you to buy sticking-plaster with."

The small ostler held back, but his companions, who perceived that the half-crown meant beer, urged him to go forward and take it; which he did, saying—

"Well, I doan't bear no malice."

"And next time that you have gentlemen's horses put into your stables, don't try to steal the price of

their corn," said the Lieutenant; and with that he turned and walked away.

"Who is the gentleman who came with me?" asked my young friend, as we went back to the house; "he is a nice young man, but he does not know the difference between hay and straw, and I begged him not to remain. And he would not drink the beer of this public-house; but that is the way of all you Englishmen—you are so particular about things, and always thinking of your health, and always thinking of living, instead of living and thinking nothing about it. Ah, you do not know how fine a thing it is to live until you have been in a campaign, my dear friend; and then you know how fine it is that you can eat with great hunger, and how fine it is when you get a tumbler of wine, and how fine it is to sleep. You are very glad, then, to be able to walk firm on your legs, and find yourself alive and strong. But always, I think, your countrymen do not enjoy being alive so much as mine; they are always impatient for something, trying to do something, hoping for something, instead of being satisfied of finding every day a good new day, and plenty of satisfaction in it, with talking to people, and seeing things, and a cigar now and again. Just now, when I wake, I laugh to myself, and say, 'How very good it is to sleep in a bed, and shut yourself out from noise, and get up when you please!' Then you have a good breakfast, and all the day begins afresh, and you have no fear of being crippled and sent off to the hospital. Oh! it is very good to have this freedom—this carelessness—this seeing of new things and new people every day. And that is a very pretty young lady become, your Miss Bell: I do remember her only a shy little girl, who spoke German with your strange English way of pronouncing the vowels, and was very much bashful over it. Oh yes, she is very good-looking indeed; her hair looks as if there were streaks of sunshine in the light brown of it, and her eyes are very thoughtful, and she has a beautiful outline of the chin that makes her neck

and throat very pretty. And, you know, I rather like the nose not hooked, like most of your English young ladies; when it is a little the other way, and fine, and delicate it makes the face piquant and tender, not haughty and cold, *nicht wahr?* But she is very English-looking; I would take her as a—as a—a—type, do you call it?—of the pretty young Englishwoman, well-formed, open-eyed, with good healthy colour in her face, and very frank and gentle, and independent all at the same time. Oh, she is a very good girl—a very good girl, I can see that."

"Yes," I said, "I think she will marry that young fellow whom you saw to-night."

"And that will be very good for him," he replied, easily; "for she will look after him and give him some common sense. He is not practical; he has not seen much; he is moody, and nervous, and thinks greatly about trifles. But I think he will be very amiable to her, and that is much. You know, all the best women marry stupid men."

There was, however, no need for our going into that dangerous subject; for at this moment we arrived at Dr. Ashburton's house. Von Rosen rushed upstairs to his room, to remove the traces of his recent employment; and then, as we both entered the drawing-room, we found Bell standing right under the central gaselier, which was pouring its rays down on her wealth of golden-brown hair. Indeed, she then deserved all that Von Rosen had said about her being a type of our handsomest young Englishwomen—rather tall, well-formed, showing a clear complexion, and healthy rosiness in her cheeks, while there was something at once defiant and gentle in her look. Comely enough she was to attract the notice of any stranger; but it was only those who had spent years with her, and had observed all her winning ways, her unselfishness, and the rare honour and honesty that lay behind all her pretty affectations of petulance, who could really tell what sort of young person our Bonny Bell was. She was sufficiently handsome to draw eyes towards her,

"But if ye saw that which no eyes can see,
The inward beauty of her lovely spirit,
Garnished with heavenly gifts of high degree,
Much more then would ye wonder at that sight.

* * * * *

There dwell sweet Love and constant Chastity,
Unspotted Faith, and comely Womanhood,
Regard of Honour, and mild Modesty."

And it must be said that during this evening Bell's conduct was beyond all praise. Arthur Ashburton was rather cold and distant towards her, and was obviously in a bad temper. He even hovered on the verge of rudeness towards both herself and the Lieutenant. Now, nothing delighted Bell more than to vary the even and pleasant tenor of her life with a series of pretty quarrels which had very little element of seriousness in them; but on this evening, when she was provoked into quarrelling in earnest, nothing could exceed the good sense, and gentleness, and forbearance she showed. At dinner she sat between the young barrister and his father, a quiet, little white-haired man in spectacles, with small black eyes that twinkled strangely when he made his nervous little jokes, and looked over to his wife—the very matter-of-fact and roseate woman who sat at the opposite end of the table. The old Doctor was a much more pleasant companion than his son; but Bell, with wonderful moderation, did her best to re-establish good relations between the moody young barrister and herself. Of course, no woman will prolong such overtures indefinitely; and at last the young gentleman managed to establish a more serious breach than he had dreamed of. For the common talk had drifted back to the then recent war, and our Lieutenant was telling us a story about three Uhlanen, who had, out of mere bravado, ridden down the main street of a French village, and out at the other end, without having been touched by the shots fired at them, when young Ashburton added with a laugh—

"I suppose they were so padded with the watches

and jewellery they had gathered on their way, that the bullets glanced off."

Count von Rosen looked across the table at this young man, with a sort of wonder in his eyes; and then, with admirable self-control, he turned to my Lady Tita, and calmly continued the story.

But as for Bell, a blush of shame and exceeding mortification overspread her features. No madness of jealousy could excuse this open insult to a stranger and a guest. From that moment, Bell addressed herself exclusively to the old Doctor, and took no more notice of his son than if he had been in the moon. She was deeply hurt, but she managed to conceal her disappointment; and indeed, when the boys came in after dinner, she had so far picked up her spirits as to be able to talk to them in that wild way which they regarded with mingled awe and delight. For they could not understand how Auntie Bell was allowed to use strange words, and even talk Cumberlandshire to the Doctor's own face.

Of course she plied the boys with all sorts of fruit and sweetmeats, until Tita, coming suddenly back from the campaign in France to the table before her, peremptorily ordered her to cease. Then Bell gathered round her the decanters; the boys had their half-glass of wine; and Bell swept them away with her into the drawing-room, when the women left.

"A very bright young lady—hm!—a very bright and pleasant young lady indeed," said the Doctor, stretching out his short legs with an air of freedom, and beginning to examine the decanters. "I don't wonder the young fellows rave about her; eh, Arthur, eh?"

Master Arthur rose and left the room.

"Touched, eh?" said the father, with his eyes twinkling vehemently, and his small grey features twisted into a smile. "Hit hard, eh? Gad, I don't wonder at it; if I were a young fellow myself—eh, eh? Claret? Yes. But the young fellows now don't sing about their laughing Lalage, or drink to Glycera, or make jokes with Lydia; it is all dreaming, and reading,

and sighing, eh, eh? That boy of mine has gone mad —heeds nothing—is ill-tempered ——"

"Very much so, Doctor."

"Eh? Ill-tempered? Why, his mother daren't talk to him, and we're glad to have him go up to his chambers again. Our young friend here is of another sort; there is no care about a woman tempering the healthy brown of the sun and the weather, eh?—is there, eh?"

"Why, my dear Doctor," cried the Lieutenant, with a prodigious laugh, "don't you think Lydia's lover—*Lydia, dic,* you know—he was very glad to be away from rough sports? He had other enjoyments. I am brown, not because of my wish, but that I have been made to work—that is all."

The Doctor was overjoyed, and, perhaps, a trifle surprised, to find that this tall Uhlan, who had just been grooming two horses, understood his references to Horace; and he immediately cried out—

"No, no; you must not lose your health, and your colour, and your temper. Would you have your friends say of you, who have just been through a campaign in France—

'Cur neque militaris
Inter æquales militat, Gallica nec lupatis
Temperat ora frenis?'

Eh, eh?"

"*Temperat ora frenis*—it is a good motto for our driving excursion," said the Lieutenant; "but was it your Miss Bell who called your two fine horses by such stupid names as Castor and Pollux?"

"Nevertheless," said the Doctor, eagerly, "Castor was said to have great skill in the management of horses,—eh, eh?"

"Certainly," said the Lieutenant. "And both together they foretell good weather, which is a fine thing in driving."

"And they were the gods of boundaries," cried the Doctor.

"And they got people out of trouble when everything seemed all over," returned the Count; "which may also happen to our phaeton."

"And—and—and"—here the Doctor's small face fairly gleamed with a joke, and he broke into a thin, high chuckle—"they ran away with two ladies—eh, eh, eh?—did they not, did they not?"

Presently we went into the drawing-room, and there the women were found in a wild maze of maps, eagerly discussing the various routes to the North, and the comparative attractions of different towns. The contents of Mr. Stanford's shop seemed to have been scattered about the room, and Bell had armed herself with an opisometer, which gave her quite an air of importance.

The Lieutenant was out of this matter, so he flung himself down into an easy chair, and presently had both of the boys on his knees, telling them stories and propounding arithmetical conundrums alternately. When Queen Tita came to release him, the young rebels refused to go; and one of them declared that the Count had promised to sing the "Wacht am Rhein."

"Oh, please, don't," said Bell, suddenly turning round, with a map of Cumberland half hiding her. "You don't know that all the organs here have it. But if you would be so very kind as to sing us a German song, I will play the accompaniment for you, if I know it, and I know a great many."

Of course, the women did not imagine that a man who had been accustomed to a soldier's life, and who had just betrayed a faculty for grooming horses, was likely to know much more of music than a handy chorus; but the Count, lightly saying he would not trouble her, went over to the piano, and sat down unnoticed amid the general hum of conversation.

But the next moment there was sufficient silence. For with a crash like thunder—"Hei! das klang wie Ungewitter!"—the young Lieutenant struck the first chords of "Prinz Eugen," and with a sort of upward toss of the head, as if he were making room for himself, he began to sing Freiligrath's picturesque soldier-song to the wild and warlike and yet stately music which Dr. Löwe has written for it. What a rare voice he had,

too !—deep, strong, and resonant—that seemed to throw itself into the daring spirit of the music with an absolute disregard of delicate graces or sentimental effect ; a powerful, masculine, soldier-like voice, that had little flute-like softness, but the strength and thrill that told of a deep chest, and that interpenetrated or rose above the loudest chords that his ten fingers struck. Queen Tita's face was overspread with surprise ; Bell unconsciously laid down the map, and stood as one amazed. The ballad, you know, tells how, one calm night on the banks of the Danube, just after the great storming of Belgrade, a young trumpeter in the camp determines to leave aside cards for a while, and make a right good song for the army to sing ; how he sets to work to tell the story of the battle in ringing verse, and at last, when he has got the rhymes correct, he makes the notes too, and his song is complete. " Ho, ye white troops and ye red troops, come round and listen !" he cries ; and then he sings the record of the great deeds of Prince Eugene ; and lo ! as he repeats the air for the third time, there breaks forth, with a hoarse roar as of thunder, the chorus " Prinz Eugen der edle Ritter !" until the sound of it is carried even into the Turkish camp. And then the young trumpeter, not dissatisfied with his performance, proudly twirls his moustache ; and finally sneaks away to tell of his triumph to the pretty Marketenderin. When our young Uhlan rose from the piano, he laughed in an apologetic fashion ; but there was still in his face some of that glow and fire which had made him forget himself during the singing of the ballad, and which had lent to his voice that penetrating resonance that still seemed to linger about the room. Bell said " Thank you" in rather a timid way ; but Queen Tita did not speak at all, and seemed to have forgotten us.

We had more music that evening, and Bell produced her guitar, which was expected to solace us much on our journey. It was found that the Lieutenant could play that too in a rough fashion ; and he executed at least a very pretty accompaniment when Bell sang " Der

Tyroler und sein Kind." But you should have seen the face of Master Arthur when Bell volunteered to sing a German song. I believe she did it to show that she was not altogether frightened by the gloomy and mysterious silence which he preserved, as he sat in a corner and stared at everybody.

So ended our first day: and to-morrow—why, to-morrow we pass away from big cities and their suburbs, from multitudes of friends, late hours, and the whirl of amusements and follies, into the still seclusion of English country life, with its simple habits, and fresh pictures, and the quaint humours of its inns.

[*Note by Queen Titania.*—"The foregoing pages give a more or less accurate account of our setting-out, but they are *all wrong* about Bell. Men are far worse than women in imagining love-affairs, and supposing that girls think about nothing else. Bell wishes *to be let alone.* If gentlemen care to make themselves uncomfortable about her, she cannot help it; but it is rather *unfair* to drag her into any such complications. I am *positive* that, though she has doubtless a little pity for that young man who vexes himself and his friends because he is not good enough for her, she would not be sorry to see him, and Count von Rosen—*and some one else besides*—all start off on a cruise to Australia. She is quite content to be as she is. Marriage will come in good time; and when it comes, she will get plenty of it, *sure enough.* In the meantime, I hope she will not be suspected of encouraging those idle flirtations and pretences of worship with which gentlemen think they ought to approach every girl whose *good fortune it is* not to be married.—T."]

## CHAPTER IV.

### ARTHUR VANISHES.

"Hampton me taught to wish her first for mine;
And Windsor, alas! doth chase me from her sight."

"RAIN!" cried Queen Titania, as she walked up to the window of the breakfast-room, and stared reproachfully out on cloudy skies, gloomy trees, and the wet thoroughfares of Twickenham.

"Surely not!" said Bell, in anxious tones; and therewith she too walked up to one of the panes, while

an expression of deep mortification settled down on her face.

She stood so for a second or two, irresolute and hurt, and then a revengeful look came into her eyes; she walked firmly over to my Lady, got close up to her ear, and apparently uttered a single word. Tita almost jumped back; and then she looked at the girl.

"Bell, how dare you?" she said, in her severest manner.

Bell turned and shyly glanced at the rest of us, probably to make sure none of us had heard; and then, all this mysterious transaction being brought to a close, she returned to the table and calmly took up a newspaper. But presently she threw it aside, and glanced, with some heightened colour in her face and some half-frightened amusement in her eyes, towards Tita; and lo! that majestic little woman was still regarding the girl, and there was surprise as well as sternness in her look.

Presently the brisk step of Lieutenant von Rosen was heard outside, and in a minute or two the tall young man came into the room, with a fine colour in his face, and a sprinkling of rain about his big brown beard.

"Ha! Not late? No? That is very good!"

"But it rains!" said Tita to him, in an injured way, as if anyone who had been out of doors was necessarily responsible for the weather.

"Not much," he said. "It may go off; but about six it did rain very hard, and I got a little wet then, I think."

"And where were you at six?" said Tita, with her pretty brown eyes opened wide.

"At Isleworth," he said, carelessly; and then he added: "Oh, I have done much business this morning, and bought something for your two boys, which will make them not mind that you go away. It is hard, you know, they are left behind——"

"But Bell has given them silver watches!" said Mamma. "Is not that enough?"

"They will break them in a day. Now when I went to the stables this morning to feed the horses, the old ostler was there. We had a quarrel last night; but no matter. We became very good friends—he told me much about Buckinghamshire and himself—he told me he did know your two boys—he told me he knew of a pony—oh! a very nice little pony—that was for sale from a gentleman in Isleworth——"

"And you've bought them a pony!" cried Bell, clapping her hands.

"Bell," said Tita, with a severe look, "how foolish you are! How could you think of anything so absurd?"

"But she is quite right, Madame," said the Lieutenant, "and it will be here in an hour, and you must not tell them till it comes."

"And you mean to leave them with that animal! Why, they will break their necks, both of them," cried my Lady.

"Oh no!" said the Lieutenant; "a tumble does not hurt boys, not at all. And this is a very quiet, small pony—oh, I did pull him about to try, and he will not harm anybody. And very rough and strong—I think the old man did call him a Scotland pony."

"A Shetland pony."

"Ah, very well," said our Uhlan; and then he began to turn wistful eyes to the breakfast table.

They sat down to breakfast, almost forgetting the rain. They were very well pleased with the coming of the pony. It would be a capital thing for the boys' health; it would be this and would be that; but only one person there reflected that this addition to the comforts of the young rogues upstairs would certainly cost him sixteen shillings a week all the year round.

Suddenly, in the midst of this talk, Bell looked up and said—

"But where is Arthur?"

"Oh," said the mother of the young man, "he went up to town this morning at eight. He took it for granted you would not start to-day."

"He might have waited to see," said Bell, looking

down. "I suppose he is not so very much occupied in the Temple. What if we have to go away before he comes back?"

"But perhaps he won't come back," said Mrs. Ashburton, gently.

Bell looked surprised; and then, with a little firmness about the mouth, held her peace for some time. It was clear that Master Arthur's absence had some considerable significance in it, which she was slowly determining in her own mind.

When Bell next spoke, she proposed that we should set out, rain or no rain.

"It will not take much time to drive down to Henley," she said. "And if we begin by paying too much attention to slight showers, we shall never get on. Besides, Count von Rosen ought to see how fine are our English rain landscapes—what softened colours are brought out in the trees and in the greys of the distance under a dark sky. It is not nearly so dismal as a wet day abroad, in a level country, with nothing but rows of poplars along the horizon. Here," she said, turning to the Lieutenant, who had probably heard of her recent successes in water-colour, "you have light mists hanging about the woods; and there is a rough surface on the rivers; and all the hedges and fields get dark and intense, and a bit of scarlet—say a woman's cloak—is very fine under the gloom of the sky. I know you are not afraid of wet, and I know that the rest of us never got into such good spirits during our Surrey drives as when we were dashing through torrents and shaking the rain from about our faces; and this is nothing—a mere passing shower—and the country down by Hounslow will look very well under dark clouds; and we cannot do better than start at once for Henley!"

"What is the matter, Bell?" said Tita, looking at the girl with her clear, observant eyes. "One would think you were vexed about our staying in Twickenham until to-morrow, and yet nobody has proposed that yet."

"I don't wish to waste time," said Bell, looking down.

Here the Lieutenant laughed aloud.

"Forgive me, Mademoiselle," he said, "but what you say is very much like the English people. They are always much afraid of losing time, though it does not matter to them. I think your commercial habits have become national, and got amongst people who have nothing to do with commerce. I find English ladies who have weeks and months at their disposal travel all night by train, and make themselves very wretched. Why? To save a day, they tell you. I find English people, with two months' holiday before them, undertake all the uncomforts of a night-passage from Dover to Calais. Why? To save a day. How does it matter to you, for example, that we start to-day, or to-morrow, or next week? Only that you feel you must be doing something—you must accomplish something—you must save time. It is all English. It is with your amusements as with your making of money. You are never satisfied. You are always looking forward—wishing to do or have certain things—never content to stop, and rest, and enjoy doing nothing."

Now what do you think our Bell did on being lectured in this fashion? Say something in reply, only kept from being saucy by the sweet manner of her saying it? Or rise and leave the room, and refuse to be coaxed into a good humour for hours? Why, no. She said in the gentlest way—

"I think you are right, Count von Rosen. It really does not matter to me whether we go to-day or to-morrow."

"But you shall go to-day, Bell," say I, "even though it should rain Duke Georges. At four of the clock we start."

"My dear," says Tita, "this is absurd."

"Probably; but none the less Castor and Pollux shall start at that hour."

"You are beginning to show your authority somewhat early," says my Lady, with a suspicious sweetness in her tone.

"What there is left of it," I remark, looking at Bell, who descries a fight in the distance, and is all attention.

"Count von Rosen," says Tita, turning in her calmest manner to the young man, "what do you think of this piece of folly? It may clear up long before that: it may be raining heavily then. Why should we run the risk of incurring serious illness by determining to start at a particular hour? It is monstrous. It is absurd. It is——it is——"

"Well," said the Lieutenant, with an easy shrug and a laugh, "it is not of much consequence you make the rule; for you will break it if it is not agreeable. For myself, I have been accustomed to start at a particular hour, whatever happens; but for pleasure, what is the use?"

"Yes, what is the use?" repeats Titania, turning to the rest of us with a certain ill-concealed air of triumph.

"St. Augustine," I observed to this rebellious person, "remarks that the obedience of a wife to her husband is no virtue, so long as she does only that which is reasonable, just, and pleasing to herself."

"I don't believe St. Augustine said anything of the kind," replied she; "and if he did, he hadn't a wife, and didn't know what he was talking about. I will not allow Bell to catch her death of cold. We shall *not* start at four."

"Two o'clock, luncheon. Half-past two the moon enters Capricorn. Three o'clock, madness rages. Four, colds attack the human race. We start at four."

By this time breakfast was over, and all the reply that Tita vouchsafed was to wear a pleased smile of defiance as she left the room. The Count, too, went out; and in a few minutes we saw him in the road, leading the pony he had bought. The boys had been kept upstairs, and were told nothing of the surprise in store for them; so that we were promised a stirring scene in front of the Doctor's house.

Presently the Lieutenant arrived at the gate, and summoned Bell from the window. She having gone to the door, and spoken to him for a second or two, went into the house, and reappeared with a bundle of coarse cloths. Was the foolish young man going to

"COME UP, DICK!" SHE SAID. P. 41.

groom the pony in front of the house, merely out of bravado? At all events, he roughly dried the shaggy coat of the sturdy little animal, and then carefully wiped the mud from its small legs and hoofs. Bell went down and took the bridle; the Lieutenant was behind, to give a push if necessary.

"Come up, Dick!" she said; and after a few frightened stumbles on the steps the pony stood in the Doctor's hall!

The clatter of the small hoofs on the waxcloth had brought the boys out to the first landing, and they were looking down with intense surprise on the appearance of a live horse in the house. When Bell had called them and told them that the Count had bought this pony for them, that it was a real pony, and that they would have to feed it every day, they came down the stairs with quite a frightened air. They regarded the animal from a distance, and then at last Master Jack ventured to go up and touch its neck.

"Why," he said, as if suddenly struck with the notion that it was really alive, "I'll get it an apple!"

He went upstairs, three steps at a bound; and by the time he came back Master Tom had got in the saddle, and was for riding his steed into the breakfast-room. Then he would ride him out into the garden. Jack insisted on his having the apple first. The mother of both called out from above that if they went into the garden in the rain she would have the whole house whipped. But all the same, Master Tom, led by the Lieutenant and followed by Bell—whose attentions in holding him on he regarded with great dislike—rode in state along the passage, and through the kitchen, and out by a back door into the garden.

"Let me go, Auntie Bell!" he said, shaking himself free. "I can ride very well—I have ridden often at Leatherhead."

"Off you go, then," said the Lieutenant: "lean well back—don't kick him with your heels—off you go."

The pony shook his rough little mane, and started upon a very sedate and patient walk along the smooth path.

"Fist! Hei! Go ahead!" cried Master Tom, and he twitched at the bridle in quite a knowing way.

Thus admonished, the pony broke into a brisk trot, which at first jogged Master Tom on to its neck, but he managed to wriggle back into the saddle and get hold of the reins again. His riding was not a masterly performance, but at all events he stuck on; and when, after having trotted thrice round the garden, he slid off of his own will and brought the pony up to us, his chubby round face was gleaming with pride, and flushed colour, and rain. Then it was Jack's turn; but this young gentleman, having had less experience, was attended by the Lieutenant, who walked round the garden with him, and gave him his first lessons in the art of horsemanship. This was a very pretty amusement for those of us who remained under the archway; but for those in the garden it was beginning to prove a trifle damp. Nevertheless, Bell begged hard for the boys to be let alone, seeing that they were overjoyed beyond expression by their new toy; and it is probable that both they and their instructor would have got soaked to the skin had not my Lady Titania appeared, with her face full of an awful wrath.

What occurred then it is difficult to relate; for in the midst of the storm Bell laughed; and the boys, being deprived of their senses by the gift of the pony, laughed also—at their own mother. Tita fell from her high estate directly. The splendours of her anger faded away from her face, and she ran out into the rain and cuffed the boys' ears, and kissed them, and drove them into the house before her. And she was so good as to thank the Count formally for his present; and with a kindly smile bade the boys be good boys and attend to their lessons when they had so much amusement provided for them; and finally turned to Bell, and said, that as we had to start at four o'clock, we might as well have our things packed before luncheon.

Now such was the reward of this wifely obedience that at four o'clock the rain had actually and definitely ceased; and the clouds, though they still hung low,

were gathering themselves up into distinct forms. When the phaeton was brought round, there was not even any necessity for putting up the hood; and Tita, having seen that everything was placed in the vehicle, was graciously pleased to ask the Lieutenant if he would drive, that she might sit beside him and point out objects of interest.

Then she kissed the boys very affectionately, and bade them take care not to tumble off the pony. The Doctor and his wife wished us every good fortune. Bell threw a wistful glance up and down the road, and then turned her face a little aside. The Count shook the reins, and our phaeton rolled slowly away from Twickenham.

"Why, Bell," I said, as we were crossing the railway bridge, and my companion looked round to see if there were a train at the station, "you have been crying."

"Not much," said Bell, frankly, but in a very low voice.

"But why?" I ask.

"You know," she said.

"I know that Arthur has been very unreasonable, and that he has gone up to London in a fit of temper; and I know what I think of the whole transaction, and what I consider he deserves. But I didn't think you cared for him so much, Bell, or were so vexed about it."

"Care for him?" she said, with a glance at the people before us, lest the low sound of her voice might not be entirely drowned by the noise of the wheels in the muddy road. "That may mean much or little. You know I like Arthur very well; and—and I am afraid he is vexed with me; and it is not pleasant to part like that with one's friends."

"He will write to you, Bell; or he will drop down on us suddenly some evening when we are at Oxford, or Worcester, or Shrewsbury——"

"I hope he will not do that," said Bell, with some expression of alarm. "If he does, I know something dreadful will happen."

"But Master Arthur, Bell, is not exactly the sort of person to displace the geological strata."

"Oh, you don't know what a temper he has at times," she said; and then, suddenly recovering herself, she added hastily, "but he is exceedingly good and kind for all that: only he is vexed, you know, at not being able to get on; and perhaps he is a little jealous of people who are successful, and in good circumstances, and independent; and he is apt to think that—that—that——"

"His lady-love will be carried off by some wealthy suitor before he has been able to amass a fortune?"

"You mustn't talk as if I were engaged to Arthur Ashburton," said Bell, rather proudly, "or even that I am ever likely to be."

Our Bonny Bell soon recovered her spirits, for she felt that we had at last really set out on our journey to Scotland, and her keen liking for all out-of-door sights and sounds was now heightened by a vague and glad anticipation. If Arthur Ashburton, as I deemed highly probable, should endeavour to overtake us, and effect a reconciliation or final understanding with Bell, we were, for the present at least, speeding rapidly away from him.

As we drove through the narrow lane running down by Whitton Park and Whitton Dean, the warm, moist winds were blowing a dozen odours about from the far, low-stretching fields and gardens; and the prevailing sweetness of the air seemed to herald our departure from the last suburban traces of London. Splash! went the horses' hoofs into the yellow pools of the roads, and the rattle of the wheels seemed to send an echo through the stillness of the quiet country-side; while overhead the dark and level clouds became more fixed and grey, and we hoped they would ultimately draw together and break, so as to give us a glimpse of pallid sunshine. Then we drove up through Hounslow to the famous inn at the cross-roads which was known to travellers in the highway-robbery days; and here our Bell complained that so many of these hostelries

should bear her name. Tita, we could hear, was telling her companion of all the strange incidents connected with this inn and its neighbourhood which she could recall from the pages of those various old-fashioned fictions which are much more interesting to some folks than the most accurate histories. So we bowled along the Bath road, over Cranford Bridge, past the Magpies, through Colnbrook, and on to Langley Marsh, when the Count suddenly exclaimed—

"But the Heath? I have not seen Hounslow Heath, where the highwaymen used to be!"

Alas! there was no more Heath to show him—only the level and wooded beauties of a cultivated English plain. And yet these, as we saw them then, under the conditions that Bell had described in the morning, were sufficiently pleasant to see. All around us stretched a fertile landscape, with the various greens of its trees and fields and hedges grown dark and strong under the gloom of the sky. The winding road ran through this country like the delicate grey streak of a river: and there were distant farmhouses peeping from the sombre foliage; an occasional wayside inn standing deserted amid its rude outhouses; a passing tramp plodding through the mire. Strange and sweet came the damp, warm winds from over the fields of beans and of clover, and it seemed as if the wild-roses in the tall and straggling hedges had increased in multitude so as to perfume the whole land. And then, as we began to see in the west, with a great joy, some faint streaks of sunshine descend like a shimmering comb upon the gloomy landscape, lo! in the south there arose before us a great and stately building, whose tall grey towers and spacious walls, seen against the dark clouds of the horizon, were distant, and pale, and spectral.

"It looks like a phantom castle, does it not?" said Bell, speaking in quite a low voice. "Don't you think it has sprung up in the heavens like the Fata Morgana, or the spectral ship, and that it will fade away again and disappear?"

Indeed it looked like the ghost of one of the castles

of King Arthur's time—that old, strange time, when England lay steeped in grey mists and the fogs blown about by the sea-winds, when there does not seem to have been any sunshine, but only a gloom of shifting vapours, half hiding the ghostly knights and the shadowy queens, and all their faint and mystical stories and pilgrimages and visions. The castle down there looked as if it had never been touched by sharp, clear, modern sunlight, that is cruel to ghosts and phantoms.

But here Bell's reveries were interrupted by Lieutenant von Rosen, who, catching sight of the castle in the south and all its hazy lines of forest, said—

"Ah, what is that?"

"That," said Bell, suddenly recovering from her trance, "is a hotel for German princes."

She had no sooner uttered the words, however, than she looked thoroughly alarmed; and with a prodigious shame and mortification she begged the Count's pardon, who merely laughed, and said he regretted he was not a prince.

"It is Windsor, is it not?" he said.

"Yes," replied Bell humbly, while her face was still pained and glowing. "I—I hope you will forgive my rudeness: I think I must have heard some one say that recently, and it escaped me before I thought what it meant."

Of course, the Lieutenant passed the matter off lightly, as a very harmless saying; but all the same Bell seemed determined for some time after to make him amends, and quite took away my Lady's occupation by pointing out to our young Uhlan, in a very respectful and submissive manner, whatever she thought of note on the road. Whether the Lieutenant perceived this intention or not, I do not know; but at all events he took enormous pains to be interested in what she said, and paid far more attention to her than to his own companion. Moreover he once or twice, in looking back, pretty nearly ran us into a cart, insomuch that Queen Tita had laughingly to recall him to his duties.

In this wise we went down through the sweetly-smelling country, with its lines of wood and hedge and its breadths of field and meadow still suffering from the gloom of a darkened sky. We cut through the village of Slough, passed the famous Salthill, got over the Two Mill Brook at Cuckfield Bridge, and were rapidly nearing Maidenhead, where we proposed to rest an hour or two and dine. Bell had pledged her word there would be a bright evening, and had thrown out vague hints about a boating excursion up to the wooded heights of Cliefden. In the meantime the sun had made little way in breaking through the clouds. There were faint indications here and there of a luminous greyish-yellow lying in the interstices of the heavy sky; but the pale and shimmering comb in the west had disappeared.

"What has come over your fine weather, Bell?" said my Lady. "Do you remember how you used to dream of our setting out, and what heaps of colour and sunshine you lavished on your picture?"

"My dear," said Bell, "you are unacquainted with the art of a stage-manager. Do you think I would begin my pantomime with a blaze of light, and bright music, and a great show of costume? No! First of all comes the dungeon scene—darkness and gloom—thunder and solemn music—nothing but demons appearing through the smoke; and then, when you have all got impressed and terrified and attentive, you will hear in the distance a little sound of melody, there will be a flutter of wings, just as if the fairies were preparing a surprise, and then all at once into the darkness leaps the queen herself, and a blaze of sunlight dashes on to her silver wings, and you see her gauzy costume, and the scarlet and gold of a thousand attendants who have all swarmed into the light."

"How long have we to wait, Mademoiselle?" said the Lieutenant, seriously.

"I have not quite settled that," replied Bell, with a fine air of reflection, "but I will see about it while you are having dinner."

Comforted by these promises—which ought, however, to have come from Queen Titania, if the fairies were supposed to be invoked—we drove underneath the railway-line and past the station of Taplow, and so forward to the hotel by the bridge. When, having with some exercise of patience seen Castor and Pollux housed and fed, I went into the parlour, I found dinner on the point of being served, and the Count grown almost eloquent about the comforts of English inns. Indeed, there was a considerable difference, as he pointed out, between the hard, bright, cheery public-room of a German inn, and this long, low-roofed apartment, with its old-fashioned furniture, its carpets, and general air of gravity and respectability. Then the series of pictures around the walls—venerable lithographs, glazed and yellow, representing all manner of wild adventures in driving and hunting—amused him much.

"That is very like your English humour," he said,—"of the country, I mean. The joke is a man thrown into a ditch, and many horses coming over on him; or it is a carriage upset in the road, and men crawling from underneath, and women trying to get through the window. It is rough, strong, practical fun, at the expense of unfortunate people, that you like."

"At least," I point out, "it is quite as good a sort of public-house furniture as pictures of bleeding saints, or lithographs of smooth-headed princes."

"Oh, I do not object to it," he said, "not in the least. I do like your sporting pictures very much."

"And when you talk of German lithographs," struck in Bell, quite warmly, "I suppose you know that it is to the German printsellers our poorer classes owe all the possession of art they can afford. They would never have a picture in their house but for those cheap lithographs that come over from Germany; and, although they are very bad, and even carelessly bad often, they are surely better than nothing for cottages and country inns that would never otherwise have anything to show but coarse patterns of wall-paper."

"My dear child," remarked Queen Tita, "we are none of us accusing Germany of any crime whatever."

"But it is very good-natured of Mademoiselle to defend my country, for all that," said the Lieutenant, with a smile. "We are unpopular with you just now, I believe. That I cannot help. It is a pity. But it is only a family quarrel, you know, and it will go away. And just now, it requires some courage to say a word for Germany, yes?"

"Why, Bell has been your bitterest enemy all through the war," said Tita, ashamed of the defection of her ancient ally.

"I think you behaved very badly to the poor French people," said Bell, looking down, and evidently wishing that some good spirit or bad one would fly away with this embarrassing topic.

The spirit appeared. There came to the open space in front of the inn a young girl of about fifteen or sixteen, with a careworn and yet healthily-coloured face, and shrewd blue eyes. She wore a man's jacket, and she had a shillelagh in her hand, which she twirled about as she glanced at the windows of the inn. Then, in a hard, cracked voice, she began to sing a song. It was supposed to be rather a dashing and aristocratic ballad, in which this oddly-clad girl with the shillelagh recounted her experiences of the opera, and told us how she loved champagne, and croquet, and various other fashionable diversions. There was something very curious in the forced gaiety with which she entered into these particulars, the shillelagh meanwhile being kept as still as circumstances would permit. But presently she sang an Irish song, describing herself as some free and easy Irish lover and fighter; and here the bit of wood came into play. She thrust one of her hands, with an audacious air, into the pocket of the jacket she wore, while she twirled the shillelagh with the other; and then, so soon as she had finished, her face dropped into a plaintive and matter-of-fact air, and she came forward to receive pence.

"She is scarcely our Lorelei," said the Count, "who sits over the Rhine in the evening. But she is a hard-working girl, you can see that. She has not much pleasure in life. If we give her a shilling, it will be much comfort to her."

And with that he went out. But what was Tita's surprise to see him go up to the girl and begin to talk to her! She, looking up to the big, brown-bearded man with a sort of awe, answered his questions with some appearance of shamefaced embarrassment: and then, when he gave her a piece of money, she performed something like a curtsey, and looked after him as he returned whistling to the door of the inn.

Then we had dinner—a plain, comfortable, wholesome meal enough; and it seemed somehow in this old-fashioned parlour that we formed quite a family party. We were cut off at last from the world of friends and acquaintances, and thrown upon each other's society in a very peculiar fashion. In what manner should we sit down to our final repast, after all this journey and its perils and accidents were over? Tita, I could see, was rather grave, and perhaps speculating on the future; while Bell and the young Lieutenant had got to talk of some people they recollected as living at Bonn some dozen years before. Nobody said a word about Arthur.

## CHAPTER V.

### QUEEN TITANIA AFLOAT.

"Say, Father Thames, for thou hast seen
Full many a sprightly race,
Disporting on thy margent green,
The paths of pleasure trace,
Who foremost now delight to cleave
With pliant arm thy glassy wave?"

At length we hit upon one thing that Count von Rosen could not do. When we had wandered down to the side of the Thames, just by Maidenhead Bridge, and

opposite the fine old houses, and smooth lawns, and green banks that stand on the other margin of the broad and shallow river, we discovered that the Lieutenant was of no use in a boat. And so, as the young folks would have us go up under the shadows of the leafy hills of Cliefden, there was nothing for it but that Tita and I should resort to the habits of earlier years, and show a later generation how to feather an oar with skill and dexterity. As Queen Titania stood by the boat-house, pulling off her gloves with economic forethought, and looking rather pensively at the landing-place and the boats and the water, she suddenly said—

"Is not this like long ago?"

"You talk like an old woman, Tita," says one of the party. "And yet your eyes are as pretty as they were a dozen years ago, when you used to walk along the beach at Eastbourne, and cry because you were afraid of becoming the mistress of a house. And now the house has been too much for you; and you are full of confused facts, and unintelligible figures, and petty anxieties, until your responsibilities have hidden away the old tenderness of your look, except at such a moment as this, when you forget yourself. Tita, do you remember who pricked her finger to sign a document when she was only a schoolgirl, and who produced it years afterwards with something of a shamefaced pride?"

"Stuff!" says Tita, angrily, but blushing dreadfully all the same; and so, with a frown and an imperious manner, she stepped down to the margin of the river.

Now mark this circumstance. In the old days of which my Lady was then thinking, she used to be very well content with pulling bow-oar when we two used to go out in the evenings. Now, when the Lieutenant and Bell had been comfortably placed in the stern, Tita daintily stepped into the boat and sat down quite naturally to pull stroke. She made no apology. She took the place as if it were hers by right. Such are the changes which a few years of married life produce.

So Bell pulled the white tiller-ropes over her shoulder,

and we glided out and up the glassy stream, into that world of greenness and soft sounds and sweet odours that lay all around. Already something of Bell's prophecy was likely to come true ; for the clouds were perceptibly growing thinner overhead, and a diffused yellow light falling from no particular place seemed to dwell over the hanging woods of Cliefden. It gave a new look, too, to the smooth river, to the rounded elms and tall poplars on the banks, and the long aits beyond the bridge, where the swans were sailing close in by the reeds.

"Look out!" cried the Lieutenant, suddenly; and at the same moment our coxswain, without a word of warning, shot us into a half-submerged forest that seemed to hide from us a lake on the other side. Tita had so little time to ship her oar that no protest was possible ; and then Von Rosen, catching hold of the branches, pulled us through the narrow channel, and lo! we were in a still piece of water, with a smooth curve of the river-bank on one side and a long island on the other, and with a pretty little house looking quietly down at us over this inland sea. We were still in the Thames; but this house seemed so entirely to have become owner of the charming landscape around and its stretch of water in front, that Bell asked in a hurry how we could get away. Tita, being still a little indignant, answered not, but put her oar into the outrigger again, and commenced pulling. And then our coxswain, who was not so familiar with the tricks of the Thames at Maidenhead as some of us, discovered a north-west passage by which it was possible to return into the main channel of the stream, and we continued our voyage.

When, at length, we had got by the picturesque old mill, and reached the sea of tumbling white water that came rushing down from the weir, it seemed as though the sky had entered into a compact with Bell to fulfil her predictions. For as we lay and rocked in the surge —watching the long level line of foam come tumbling over in spouts and jets and white masses, listening to

the roar of the fall, and regarding the swirling circles of white bells that swept away downward on the stream—there appeared in the west, just over the line of the weir, a parallel line of dark blood-red. It was but a streak as yet; but presently it widened and grew more intense—a great glow of crimson colour came shining forth—and it seemed as if all the western heavens, just over that line of white foam, were becoming a mass of fire. Bell's transformation-scene was positively blinding; and the bewilderment of the splendid colours was not lessened by the roar of the tumbling river, that seemed strangely wild in the stillness of the evening.

But when we turned to drop quietly down the stream, the scene around us was so lovely that Queen Titania had no heart to pull away from it. For now the hanging woods of beech and birch and oak had caught a glow of the sunset along their masses of yellow and green, and the broad stream had the purple of its glassy sweeps dashed here and there with red; and in the far east a reflected tinge of pink mingled with the cold green, and lay soft and pure and clear over the low woods, and the river, and the bridge. As if by magic the world had grown suddenly light, ethereal, and full of beautiful colours; and the clouds that still remained overhead had parted into long cirrhous lines, with pearly edges, and a touch of scarlet and gold along their western side.

"What a drive we shall have this evening!" cried Bell. "It will be a clear night when we get to Henley, and there will be stars over the river, and perhaps a moon,—who knows?"

"I thought you would have provided a moon, Mademoiselle," said the Lieutenant, gravely. "You have done very well for us this evening—oh! very well indeed. I have not seen any such beautiful picture for many years. You did very well to keep a dark day all day, and make us tired of cold colours and green trees; and then you surprise us by this picture of magic—oh! it is very well done."

"All that it wants," said Bell, with a critical eye, "is a little woman in a scarlet shawl under the trees there, and over the green of the rushes—one of those nice fat little women who always wear bright shawls just to please landscape-painters—making a little blob of strong colour, you know, just like a ladybird among green moss. Do you know, I am quite grateful to a pleasant little countrywoman when she dresses herself ridiculously merely to make a landscape look fine; and how can you laugh at her when she comes near? I sometimes think that she wears those colours, especially those in her bonnet, out of mere modesty. She does not know what will please you—she puts in a little of everything to give you a choice. She holds up to you a whole bouquet of flowers, and says, 'Please, Miss, do you like blue? for here is corn-cockle;—or red? for here are poppies;—or yellow? for here are rock-roses.' She is like Perdita, you know, going about with an armful of blossoms, and giving to everyone what she thinks will please them."

"My dear," says Tita, "you are too generous. I am afraid that the woman wears those things out of vanity. She does not know what colour suits her complexion best, and so wears a variety, quite sure that one of them must be the right one. And there are plenty of women in town, as well as in the country, who do that too."

"I hope you don't mean me," said Bell, contritely, as she leaned her arm over the side of the boat, and dipped the tips of her fingers into the glassy stream.

But if we were to get to Henley that night, there was no time for lingering longer about that bend by the river, with its islands and mills and woods. That great burst of colour in the west had been the expiring effort of the sun; and when we got back to the inn, there was nothing left in the sky but the last golden and crimson traces of his going down. The river was becoming grey, and the Cliefden woods were preparing for the night by drawing over themselves a thin veil of mist, which rendered them distant and shadowy, as they lay under the lambent sky.

The phaeton was at the door; our bill paid; an extra shawl got out of the imperial—although, in that operation, the Lieutenant nearly succeeded in smashing Bell's guitar.

"It will be dark before we get to Henley," says Tita.

"Yes," I answer obediently.

"And we are going now by cross-roads," she remarks.

"The road is a very good one," I venture to reply.

"But still it is a cross-road," she says.

"Very well, then, my dear," I say, wondering what the little woman is after.

"You must drive," she continues, "for none of us know the road."

"Yes, m'm, please m'm: any more orders?"

"Oh, Bell," says my Lady, with a gracious air (she can change the expression of her face in a second), "would you mind taking Count von Rosen under your charge until we get to Henley? I am afraid it will take both of us to find the road in the dark."

"No, I will take you under my charge, Mademoiselle," said the Lieutenant, frankly; and therewith he helped Bell into the phaeton, and followed himself.

The consequence of this little arrangement was, that while Tita and I were in front, the young folks were behind: and no sooner had we started from the inn, got across the bridge, and were going down the road towards the village of Maidenhead proper, than Titania says, in a very low voice—

"Do you know, my dear, our pulling together in that boat quite brought back old times; and—and—and I wanted to be sitting up here beside you for a while, just to recall the old, old drives we used to have you know, about here, and Henley, and Reading. How long ago is it, do you think?"

That wife of mine is a wonderful creature. You would have thought she was as innocent as a lamb when she uttered these words, looking up with a world of sincerity and pathos in the big, clear, earnest brown eyes. And the courage of the small creature,

too, who thought she could deceive her husband by this open, transparent, audacious piece of hypocrisy!

"Madam," I said, with some care that the young folks should not overhear, "your tenderness overwhelms me."

"What do you mean?" she says, suddenly becoming as cold and as rigid as Lot's wife after the accident happened.

"Perhaps," I ventured to suggest, "you would like to have the hood up, and so leave them quite alone? Our presence must be very embarrassing."

"You are insulting Bell in saying such things," she says warmly; "or perhaps it is that you would rather have her for a companion than your own wife."

"Well, to tell you the truth, I would."

"She shall not sit by the Lieutenant again."

"I hope you don't mean to strangle her. We should arrive in Edinburgh in a sort of unicorn-fashion."

Tita relapsed into a dignified silence—that is always the way with her when she has been found out; but she was probably satisfied by hearing the Count and Bell chatting very briskly together, thus testifying to the success of her petty stratagem.

It was a pleasant drive, on that quiet evening, from Maidenhead across the lonely country that lies within the great curve of the Thames. Instead of turning off at the corner of Stubbing's Heath, and so getting into the road that runs by Hurley Bottom, we held straight on towards Wargrave, so as to have the last part of the journey lead us up by the side of the river. So still it was! The road led through undulating stretches of common and past the edges of silent woods, while the sky was becoming pale and beautiful overhead, and the heights on the northern horizon—between Cookham and Hurley—were growing more and more visionary in the dusk. Sometimes, but rarely, we met a solitary wanderer coming along through the twilight, and a gruff "good-night" greeted us; but for the most part there seemed no life in this lonely part of the country, where rabbits ran

across the road in front of us, and the last rooks that flew by in the dusk seemed hastening on to the neighbourhood of some distant village. It was a mild, fresh evening, with the air still damp and odorous after the rain; but overhead the sky still remained clear, and here and there, in the partings of the thin cloud, a pale star or planet had become faintly visible.

At last we got down into the village of Wargrave, and then it was nearly dark. There were a few people, mostly women, standing at the doors of the cottages; and here and there a ray of yellow light gleamed out from a small window. As we struck into the road that runs parallel with the Thames, there were men coming home from their work; and their talk was heard at a great distance in the stillness of the night.

"How far are we from Henley?" said Bell.

"Are you anxious to get there?" replied Queen Titania, smiling quite benignly.

"No," said Bell, "this is so pleasant that I should like to go driving on until midnight, and we could see the moon coming through the trees."

"You have to consider the horses," said the Lieutenant, bluntly. "If you do tire them too much on the first days, they will not go so long a journey. But yet we are some way off, I suppose; and if Mademoiselle will sing something for us, I will get out the guitar."

"You'd better get down and light the lamps, rather," I remark to those indolent young people; whereupon the Count was instantly in the road, striking wax matches, and making use of curious expressions that seemed chiefly to consist of *g*'s and *r*'s.

So, with the lamps flaring down the dark road, we rolled along the highway that here skirts the side of a series of heights looking down into the Thames. Sometimes we could see a grey glimmer of the river beneath us through the trees; at other times the road took us down close to the side of the water, and Castor got an opportunity of making a playful little shy or two; but for the most part we drove through

dense woods, that completely shut off the starlight overhead.

More than once, indeed, we came to a steep descent that was buried in such total darkness that the Lieutenant jumped down and took the horses' heads, lest some unlucky step or stumble should throw us into the river. So far as we could make out, however, there was a sufficient wall on the side of the highway next the stream—a rough old wall, covered with plants and moss, that ran along the high and wooded bank.

Suddenly Bell uttered a cry of delight. We had come to a cleft in the glade which showed us the river running by some sixty feet beneath us, and on the surface of the water the young crescent of the moon was clearly mirrored. There was not enough moonlight to pierce the trees, or even to drown the pale light of the stars; but the sharp disc of silver, as it glimmered on the water, was sufficiently beautiful, and contained in itself the promise of many a lovely night.

"It has begun the journey with us," said Bell. "It is a young moon; it will go with us all the month; and we shall see it on the Severn, and on Windermere, and on the Solway, and on the Tweed. Didn't I promise you all a moon, sooner or later? And there it is!"

"It does not do us much good, Bell," said the driver, ruefully, the very horses seeming afraid to plunge into the gulfs of darkness that were spectrally peered into by the light of the lamps.

"The moon is not for use," said Bell, "it is for magic; and once we have got to Henley, and put the horses up, and gone out again to the river, you shall all stand back and watch in a corner, and let Queen Titania go forward to summon the fairies. And as you listen in the dark, you will hear a little crackling and rustling along the opposite shore, and you will see small blue lights come out from the banks, and small boats, with a glowworm at their prow, come out into the stream. And then from the boats, and from all the fields near—where the mist of the river lies at night—

you will see wonderful small men and women of radiant blue flame come forward, and there will be a strange sound like music in the trees, and the river itself will begin to say, in a kind of laugh, '*Titania, Titania! you have been so long away—years and years—looking after servants, and the schooling of boys, and the temper of a fractious husband——*'"

"Bell, you are impertinent."

"There are true words spoken in jest, sometimes," says Tita, with a dainty malice.

"Your bearing rein in England is a cruelty to the horse—you must take it away to-morrow," said the Lieutenant; and this continuation of a practical subject recalled these scapegraces from their jibes.

Here the road took us down by a gradual dip to the river again, and for the last mile before reaching our destination we had a pleasant and rapid run along the side of the stream. Then the lights of Henley were seen to glimmer before us; we crossed over the bridge, and swerving round to the right, drove into the archway of the Bell Inn.

"No, sir," remarked Dr. Johnson to Mr. Boswell, "there is nothing which has yet been contrived by man, by which so much happiness is produced as by a good tavern or inn." He then repeated, with great emotion, we are told, Shenstone's lines—

> "Whoe'er has travelled life's dull round,
> Where'er his stages may have been,
> May sigh to think he still has found
> The warmest welcome at an inn."

And Mr. Boswell goes on to say: "We happened to lie this night at the inn at Henley, where Shenstone wrote these lines." Now, surely, if ever belated travellers had reason to expect a cordial welcome, it was we four as we drove into the famous hostelry which had awakened enthusiasm in the poets and lexicographers of bygone days. But as Castor and Pollux stood under the archway, looking into the great dark yard before them, and as we gazed round in vain for the appearance of any waiter or other official, it occurred to Tita that

the Bell Inn must have changed hands since Shenstone's time. Where was our comfortable welcome? A bewildered maid-servant came to stare at our phaeton with some alarm. Plaintive howls for the ostler produced a lad from the darkness of the stables, who told us that the ostler was away somewhere. Another maid-servant came out, and also looked alarmed. The present writer, fearing that Tony Lumpkin, transformed into an invisible spirit, had played him a trick, humbly begged this young woman to say whether he had driven by mistake into a private house. The young person looked afraid.

"My good girl," says Tita, with a gracious condescension, "will you tell us if this is the Bell Inn?"

"Yes, 'm; of course, 'm."

"And can we stay here to-night?"

"I'll bring the waiter, ma'am, directly."

Meanwhile the Lieutenant had got down, and was fuming about the yard to rout out the ostler's assistants, or some people who could put up the horses. He managed to unearth no fewer than three men, whom he brought in a gang. He was evidently determined not to form his grooming of the horses at Twickenham into a precedent.

At last there came a waiter, looking rather sleepy and a trifle helpless; whereupon my Lady and Bell departed into the inn, and left the luggage to be sent after them. There appeared to be no one inside the house. The gases were lit in the spacious coffee-room; some rugs and bags were brought in and placed on the table; and then Tita and her companion, not daring to remove their bonnets, sat down in arm-chairs and stared at each other.

> "I fly from pomp, I fly from plate;
> I fly from falsehood's specious grin;
> But risk a ten times worser fate
> In choosing lodgings at an inn:"

—this was what Bell repeated, in a gentle voice, on the very spot that is sacred to the memory of Shenstone's satisfaction.

I requested the young man in the white tie to assign some reason for this state of affairs; and his answer was immediately forthcoming. There had been a regatta a few days before. The excitement in the small town, and more especially in the "Bell," had been dreadful. Now a reaction had set in; Henley and the "Bell" were alike deserted; and we were the victims of a collapse. I complimented the waiter on his philosophical acumen, and went out to see what had befallen Count von Rosen and the horses.

I found him standing in a stable that was dimly lighted by a solitary candle stuck against the wall, superintending the somewhat amateurish operations of the man who had undertaken to supply the ostler's place. The Lieutenant had evidently not been hectoring his companions; on the contrary, he was on rather good terms with them, and was making inquiries about the familiar English names for chopped hay and other luxuries of the stable. He was examining the corn, too, and pronouncing opinion on the split beans which he had ordered. On the whole, he was satisfied with the place; although he expressed his surprise that the ostler of so big an inn should be absent.

When, at length, we had seen each of the horses supplied with an ample feed, fresh straw, and plenty of hay, the men were turned out and the stable-door locked. He allowed them on this occasion to keep the key. As we crossed the yard, a rotund, frank, cheery-looking man appeared, who was presumably the ostler. He made a remark or two; but the night-air was chill.

"Now," said Von Rosen, when we got into the big parlour, "we have to make ourselves pleasant and comfortable. I do think we must all drink whisky. For myself, I do not like the taste very much; but it looks very comfortable to see some people with steaming glasses before them. And I have brought out Mademoiselle's guitar, and she will sing us some songs, yes?"

"But you must also," says Bell, looking down.

"Oh, a hundred! a thousand! as many as you like!"

he said; and then, with a sort of sigh, he took his cigar-case out of his pocket and laid it pathetically on the mantelpiece. There was an air of renunciation in his face. Forthwith he rang the bell; and the waiter was asked to bring us certain liquors which, although not exclusively whisky, could be drunk in those steaming tumblers which the Lieutenant loved to see.

"O, come you from Newcastle?

—this was what Bell sang, with the blue ribbon of her guitar slung round her neck:

"O, come you from Newcastle?
Come you not there away?
And did you meet my true love,
Riding on a bonny bay?

And as she sang, with her eyes cast down, the Lieutenant seemed to be regarding her face with a peculiar interest. He forgot to lift the hot tumbler that was opposite him on the table—he had even forgotten Tita's gracious permission that he might have a cigar—he was listening and gazing merely, in a blank silence. And when she had finished, he eagerly begged her to sing another of the old English songs. And she sang—

"O mistress mine, where are you roaming?
O mistress mine, where are you roaming?
O stay and hear, your true love's coming,
That can sing both high and low."

And when she had finished, he once more eagerly begged her to sing another of those old songs; and then, all of a sudden, catching sight of a smile on my Lady's face, he stopped, and apologized, and blushed rather, and said it was too bad—that he had forgotten, and would himself try something on the guitar.

When, at length, the women had gone upstairs, he fetched down his cigar from the mantelpiece, lit it, stretched out his long legs, and said—

"How very English she is!"

"She! who?"

"Why, your Miss Bell. I do like to hear her talk of England as if she had a pride in it, and mention the names of towns as if she loved them because they were English, and speak of the fairies and stories as if she was familiar with them because they belong to her own country. You can see how she is fond of everything that is like old times,—an old house, an old milestone, an old bridge — everything that is peculiar and old and English. And then she sings, oh! so very well—so very well indeed; and these old songs, about English places and English customs of village-life, they seem to suit her very well, and you think she herself is the heroine of them. But as for that young man in Twickenham, he is a very pitiful fellow."

"How have you suddenly come to that conclusion?" I inquire of our Lieutenant, who is lazily letting the cigar-smoke curl about his moustache and beard as he lies back and fixes his light blue eyes contemplatively on the ceiling.

"How do I know? I do not know: I think so. He ought to be very well satisfied of knowing a young lady like that—and very proud of going to marry her—instead of annoying her with bad tempers."

"That is true. A young man under such circumstances cannot be too grateful or too amiable. They are not always so, however. You yourself, for example, when you parted from Fräulein Fallersleben——"

Here the Lieutenant jumped up in his chair, and said with unnecessary vehemence—

"Donnerwetter! look at the provocation I had! It was not my ill-temper; I am not more ill-tempered than other men: but when you know you mean very well, and that you treat a woman as perhaps not all men would be inclined to do in the same case, and she is a hypocrite, and she pretends much, and at the same time she is writing to you, she is—pfui! I cannot speak of it!"

"You were very fond of her."

"Worse luck."

"And you had a great fight, and used hard words to each other, and parted so that you would rather meet Beelzebub than her."

"Why, yes, it is so: I would rather meet twenty Beelzebubs than her."

"That is the way of you boys. You don't know that in after years, when all these things have got smooth and misty and distant, you will come to like her again; and what will you think then of your hard words and your quarrels? If you children could only understand how very short youth is, how very long middle age is, and how very dull old age is,—if you could only understand how the chief occupation of the longer half of your life is looking back on the first short half of it,—you would know the value of storing up only pleasant recollections of all your old friends. If you find that your sweetheart is a woman compelled by her nature to fall in love with the man nearest her, and forget him who is out of the way, why devote her to the infernal gods? In after years, you will be grateful to her for the pleasant days and weeks you spent with her, when you were both happy together, and you will look back on the old times very tenderly; and then, on those occasions when you German folks drink to the health of your absent dear ones, won't you be glad that you can include her who was dear enough to you in your youth?"

"That is very good; it is quite true," said the Lieutenant, in almost an injured tone—as if Fräulein Fallersleben were responsible.

"Look for a moment," I say to my pensive pupil, "at the pull a man has who has spent his youth in pleasant scenery. When he gets old, and can do nothing but live the old life over again by looking back, he has only to shut his eyes, and his brain is full of fresh and bright pictures of the old times in the country; and the commonest landscape of his youth he will remember then as if it were steeped in sunlight."

"That is quite true," said Von Rosen, thoughtfully;

but the next moment he uttered an angry exclamation, started up from his chair, and began walking up and down the room.

"It is all very well," he said, with an impatient vehemence, "to be amiable and forgiving when you are old—because you don't care about it, that is the reason. When you are young, you expect fair play. Do you think if I should be seventy I will care one brass farthing whether Pauline—that is, Fräulein Fallersleben—was honest or no? I will laugh at the whole affair then. But now, when you are ashamed of the deceit of a woman, is it not right you tell her? Is it not right she knows what honest men and women think of her, yes? What will she think of you if you say to her, '*Farewell, Fräulein. You have behaved not very well; but I am amiable; I will forgive you.*'"

"There, again: you parted with her in wrath, because you did not like to appear weak and complaisant in her eyes."

"At all events, I said what I felt," said the Lieutenant, warmly. "I do think it is only hypocrisy and selfishness to say, '*I hate this woman, but I will be kind to her, because when I grow old I will look back and consider myself to have been very good.*'"

"You have been deeply hit, my poor lad; you are quite fevered about it now. You cannot even see how a man's own self-respect will make him courteous to a woman whom he despises; and is he likely to be sorry for that courtesy, when he looks at it in cold blood, and recognizes the stupendous fact that the man who complains of the inconstancy of a woman utters a reflection against Providence?"

"But you don't know—you don't know," said the Count, pitching his cigar into the grate, "what a woman this one showed herself to be. After all, it does not matter. But when I look at such a woman as your Miss Bell here——"

"Yes: when you look at her?"

"Why, I see the difference," said the Lieutenant, gloomily; and therewith he pulled out another cigar.

I stopped this, however, and rang for candles. As he lit his in rather a melancholy fashion, he said—

"It is a very good thing to see a woman like that—young-hearted, frank, honest in her eyes, and full of pleasantness, too, and good spirits—oh! it is very fine indeed, merely to look at her; for you do believe that she is a very good girl, and you think there are good women in the world. But as for that young man at Twickenham——"

"Well, what of him?"

The Lieutenant looked up from the candle; but saw nothing to awaken his suspicions.

"Oh," he said carelessly, as we left the room, "I do think him a most pitiful fellow."

## CHAPTER VI.

### A GIFT OF TONGUES.

"My lady is an archer rare,
And in the greenwood joyeth she;
There never was a marksman yet who could compare
In skill with my ladie."

EARLY morning in Henley! From over the wooded hills in the east there comes a great flood of sunshine that lies warmly on the ruddy side of the old inn, on its evergreens, and on the slopes of sweet-scented mignonette, and sweetbriar, and various blossoms that adorn the bank of the river. The river itself, lying apparently motionless between level and green meadows, has its blue surface marred here and there by a white ripple of wind; the poplars that stand on its banks are rustling in the breeze; there are swallows dipping and skimming about the old bridge, and ducks paddling along among the rushes and weeds, and cattle browsing in the deep green; and further on, some high-lying stretches of rye-grass struck into long and silvery waves by the morning wind.

All the stir and motion of the new day have come upon us; and Henley, clean, white, and red, with its town-hall shining brightly down its chief street, and all its high clusters of old-fashioned houses backed by a fringe of dark-wooded hill, shows as much life and briskness as are usually seen in a quaint, small, old-fashioned English town. But where the silence and the stillness of the morning dwell is away up the reach of the river. Standing on the bridge, you see the dark blue stream, reflecting a thousand bright colours underneath the town, gradually become greyer in hue until it gets out amid the meadows and woods; and then, with a bold white curve, that is glimmering like silver in the north, it sweeps under that line of low, soft green hills which have grown pearly and grey in the tender morning mist. Bell is standing on the bridge, too. The Lieutenant has brought out her sketch-book, and she has placed it on the stone parapet before her. But somehow she seems disinclined to begin work thus early on our journey; and, instead, her eyes are looking blankly and wistfully at the rich green meadows and the red cows, and the long white reach of the river shining palely beneath the faint green heights in the north.

"Is Henley the prettiest town in the world, I wonder?" she said.

"Yes, if you think so, Mademoiselle," replied Von Rosen, gently.

She lifted her eyes towards him, as though she had been unaware of his presence. Then she turned to the stream.

"I suppose, if one were to live always among those bright colours, one would get not to see them, and would forget how fine is this old bridge, with the pretty town, and the meadows, and the stream. Seeing it only once, I shall never forget Henley, or the brightness of this morning."

With that, she closed her sketch-book, and looked round for Tita. That small person was engaged in making herself extremely wretched about her boys and

the pony; and was becoming vastly indignant because she could get no one to sympathise with her wild imaginings of diverse perils and dangers.

"Why, to hear you talk," she was saying at this moment, "one would think you had never experienced the feelings of a parent—that you did not know you were the father of those two poor boys."

"That," I remark to her, "is not a matter on which I am bound to express an opinion."

"Very pretty—very!" she said with a contemptuous smile. "But I will say this—that if *you* had had to buy the pony, the boys would have had to wait long enough before they were exposed to the dangers you think so little about now."

"Madam," I observe, sternly, "you are the victim of what theologians call invincible ignorance. I might have bought that pony and all its belongings for a 20*l.* note; whereas I shall have to pay 40*l.* a year for its keep."

"Oh, I know," says my Lady, with great sweetness, "how men exaggerate those things. It is convenient. They complain of the cost of the horses, of the heaviness of the taxes, and other things; when the real fact is that they are trying to hide what they spend out of their income on cigars, and in their clubs when they go to town. I counted up our taxes the other day, and I don't believe that they have been over 8*l.* for the whole of the last six months. Now you *know* you said they were nearly 35*l.* a year."

"And you counted in those that are due next week, I suppose?"

"Did you leave money to pay for them?" she asks, mildly.

"And you based your calculations on some solitary instalment for armorial bearings?—which you brought into the family, you know."

"Yes," she replies, with an engaging smile. "That was one thing you did not require before—I am sorry to have caused you so much expense. But you need not avoid the subject. Mrs. Quinet told me last

week that she knows her husband pays every year 65*l.* for club-subscriptions alone, and nearly 40*l.* for cigars."

"Then Mrs. Quinet must have looked into your eyes, my dear, and seen what a simple little thing you are; for your knowledge of housekeeping and other expenses, I will say, is as slight as need be, and Mrs. Quinet has been simply making a fool of you. For the Major belongs to two clubs, and in the one he pays eight guineas and in the other ten guineas a year. And he smokes Manillas at 25*s.* a hundred, which is equivalent, my dear—though you will scarcely credit it—to threepence apiece."

"The money must go somehow," says Tita, defiantly.

"That is a customary saying among women; but it generally refers to their own little arrangements."

"You avoid the question very skilfully."

"I should have thought you would have preferred that."

"Why?" she says, looking up.

"Because you accused me of stinginess in not buying a pony for the boys, and I showed you that I should have to pay 40*l.* a year for the brute."

"Yes, *showed* me! I suppose by that pleasing fiction you will gain another 20*l.* a year to spend in Partagas, and Murias, and trumpery stuff that the tobacconists tell you came from abroad."

"My dear," I say, "your insolence is astounding."

"If you call speaking the plain truth insolence, I cannot help it. Bell, breakfast must be ready."

"Yes, my Lady," says Bell, coming forward demurely. "But I wasn't doing anything."

So they went off; and the Count and I followed.

"What is the matter?" says he.

"Do you know what a 'relish' is at breakfast?"

"No."

"Then don't marry, or you will find out."

The tall young man with the brown beard and the light eyes, shrugged his shoulders, and only said, as we walked to the inn—

"That is a very pleasant comedy, when it means nothing. If it was earnest, you would not find so much enjoyment in it—no, not at all—you would not amuse yourselves, like two children, instead of the parents of a family. But, my dear friend, it is a dangerous thing; for some day you will meet with a stupid person, who will not understand how Madame and yourself do make-believe in that way, and that person will be astonished, and will talk of it, and you will both have a very bad reputation among your friends."

However, there was one amiable person at the breakfast-table, and that was our pretty Bell.

"Bell," I said, "I am going to sit by you. You never provoke useless quarrels about nothing; you are never impertinent; you never argue; and you can look after a breakfast-table better than people twice your age."

Bell prudently pretended not to hear; indeed, she was very busy helping everybody and making herself very useful and pleasant all round. She seemed to have forgotten her independent ways; and was so good-naturedly anxious to see that the Lieutenant's coffee was all right, that he was apparently quite touched by her friendliness. And then she was very cheerful too; and was bent on waking up the spirits of the whole party—but in a bright, submissive, simple fashion that the audacious young lady did not always affect.

"Did you hear the cocks crowing this morning?" she said, turning to Von Rosen with her frank eyes. "I thought it was so pleasant to be woke up that way instead of listening to the milkman coming along a dismal London square, and calling up the maidservants with his '*El-cho!*' '*El-cho!*' But did you notice that one of the cocks cried quite plainly, '*Oh, go away!*' *Oh, go awa-a-ay!*'—which was a stupid animal to have near an inn; and another fine fellow, who always started with a famous flourish, had got a cold, and at the highest note he went off at a tangent into something like a plaintive squeak. The intention of that crow, so far as it went, was far better than the feeble '*Oh, go away!*'

of the other; and I was quite sorry for the poor animal. —Do have some more toast, Count.—He reminded me of poor Major Quinet, Tita, who begins a sentence very well; but all at once it jerks up into the air—goes off like a squib, you know, just below his nose; and he looks amazed and ashamed, like a boy that has let a bird escape out of a bag."

"You need not amuse yourself with the personal defects of your neighbours, Bell," says Tita, who did not expect to have Major Quinet brought forward again. "Major Quinet is a very well-informed and gentlemanly man, and looks after his family and his estate with the greatest care."

"I must say, Tita," retorted Bell (and I trembled for the girl), "that you have an odd trick of furnishing people with a sort of certificate of character, whenever you hear their names mentioned. Very likely the Major can manage his affairs in spite of his cracked voice; but you know you told me yourself, Tita, that he had been unfortunate in money matters, and was rather perplexed just now. Of course, I wouldn't say such a thing of one of your friends; but I have heard of bankrupts; and I have heard of a poor little man being so burdened with debt, that he looked like a mouse drawing a brougham, and then, of course, he had to go into the Court to ask them to unharness him.—Do have some more coffee, Count; I am sure that is quite cold."

"You ought to be a little careful, Bell," says my Lady. "You know absolutely nothing of Major Quinet, and yet you hint that he is insolvent."

"I didn't—did I?" says Bell, turning to her companion.

"No," replies the Count, boldly.

At this Tita looked astonished for a second; but presently she deigned to smile, and say something about the wickedness of young people. Indeed, my Lady seemed rather pleased by Bell's audacity in appealing to the Lieutenant; and she was in a better humour when, some time after, we went out to the river and got a boat.

Once more upon the Thames, we pulled up the river, that lies here between wooded hills on the one side, and level meadows on the other. The broad blue stream was almost deserted; and as we got near the green islands, we could see an occasional young moorhen paddle out from among the rushes, and then go quickly in again, with its white tail bobbing in unison with its small head and beak. We rowed into the sluice of the mill that lies under Park Place, and there, having floated down a bit under some willows, we fixed the boat to a stump of a tree, landed, and managed to get into the road along which we had driven the previous night. As we ascended this pleasant path, which is cut through the woods of various mansions, and looks down upon the green level of Wargrave Marsh, and the shining meadows beyond the other bank of the river, the ascents and descents of the road seemed less precipitous than they had appeared the night before. What we had taken, further, for wild masses of rock, and fearful chasms, and dangerous bridges, were found to be part of the ornamentation of a park—the bridge spanning a hollow having been built of sham rock-work, which, in the daylight, clearly revealed its origin. Nevertheless, this road leading through the river-side woods is a sufficiently picturesque and pleasant one; and in sauntering along for a mile or two and back we consumed a goodly portion of the morning. Then there was a brisk pull back to Henley; and the phaeton was summoned to appear.

When the horses were put in, and the phaeton brought out, I found that Von Rosen had quietly abstracted the bearing-reins from the harness, some time during the morning. However, no one could grudge the animals this relief, for the journey they had to make to-day, though not over twenty-three miles, was considerably hilly.

Now Tita had come early out, and had evidently planned a nice little arrangement. She got in behind. Then she bade Bell get up in front. The Lieutenant had lingered for a moment in search of a cigar-case; and my Lady had clearly determined to ask him to

THE THAMES. [illegible]

drive so soon as he came out. But, as she had not expressed any contrition for her conduct of that morning, some punishment was required; and so, just as Von Rosen came out, I took the reins, stepped up beside Bell, and he, of course, was left to join the furious little lady behind.

"I thought the Count was going to drive," says Tita, with a certain cold air. "Surely the road to Oxford is easy to find."

"It is," I say to her. "For you know all roads lead to Rome, and they say that Oxford is half-way to Rome —*argal*——"

But knowing what effect this reference to her theological sympathies was likely to have on Tita, I thought it prudent to send the horses on; and as they sprang forward and rattled up the main street of Henley, her retort, if any, was lost in the noise. There was a laugh in Bell's eyes; but she seemed rather frightened all the same, and said nothing for some time.

The drive from Henley to Oxford is one of the finest in England, the road leading gradually up through pleasant pastures and great woods until it brings you on to a common—the highest ground south of the Trent —from which you see an immeasurable wooded plain stretching away into the western horizon. First of all, as we left Henley on that bright morning, the sweet air blowing coolly among the trees, and bringing us odours from wild flowers and breadths of new-mown hay, we leisurely rolled along what is appropriately called the Fair Mile, a broad smooth highway running between Lambridge Wood and No Man's Hill, and having a space of grassy common on each side of it. This brought us up to Assenton Cross, and here, the ascent getting much more stiff, Bell took the reins, and the Count and I walked up the hill until we reached Bix Turnpike.

"What a curious name!" said Bell, as she pulled the horses up.

"Most likely," said the Lieutenant, who was looking at an ancient edition of Cary's Itinerary, "it is from the

old Saxon *bece*, the beech-tree, which is plentiful here. But in this book I find it is Bixgibwen, which is not in the modern books. Now what is *gibwen?*"

"St. Caedwyn, of course," said Bell, merrily.

"You laugh, but perhaps it is true," replied the Lieutenant, with the gravity befitting a student: "why not St. Caedwyn's beeches? You do call many places about here by the trees. There is Assenton; that is the place of ash-trees. We shall soon be at Nettlebed; and then comes Nuffield, which is Nut-field,—how do you call your wildnut-tree in England?"

"The hazel," said Bell. "But that is commonplace; I like the discovery about St. Caedwyn's beeches better: and here, sure enough, they are."

The road at this point—something less than a mile past Bix turnpike—plunges into a spacious forest of beeches, which stretches along the summit of the hill almost on to Nettlebed. And this road is bordered by a strip of common, which again leads into a tangled maze of bracken and briar; and then you have the innumerable stems of the beeches, showing long vistas into the green heart of the wood. The sunlight was shimmering down on this wilderness, lying warmly on the road and its green margin, and piercing here and there with golden arrows the dense canopy of leaves beyond. High as we were the light breeze was shut off by the beeches, and in the long broad cleft in which the road lay the air was filled with resinous odours, that of the tall green and yellow brackens prevailing. An occasional jay fled screaming down between the smooth grey branches, giving us a glimpse of white and blue as it vanished; but otherwise there seemed to be no birds about, and the wild underwood and long alleys lay still and warm in the green twilight of the leaves.

"It is very like the Black Forest, I think," said the Lieutenant.

"Oh, it is much lighter in colour," cried Bell. "Look at all those silver greys of the stems and the lichens, and clear green overhead, and the light browns and reds beneath, where the sunlight shines down through a veil.

It is lighter, prettier, more cheerful than your miles of solemn pines, with the great roads cut through them for the carts, and the gloom and stillness underneath, where there is no growth of underwood, but only level beds of green moss, dotted with dropped cones."

"You have a very accurate eye for colours, Mademoiselle; no wonder you paint so well," was all that the Lieutenant said. But Tita warmly remonstrated with Bell.

"You know, Bell," she said, "that all the Black Forest is not like that; there is every variety of forest-scenery there. And pray, Miss Criticism, where were the gloomy pines and the solemn avenues in a certain picture which was sold at the Dudley last year for twenty-five solid English sovereigns?"

"You needn't tell Count von Rosen what my income is," said Bell. "I took two months to paint that picture."

"That is a very good income," said the Lieutenant, with a smile.

"I do not like people with large incomes," said Bell, dexterously avoiding that part of the subject. "I think they must have qualms sometimes, or else be callous. Now I would have everybody provided with a certain income, say 200*l.* a year; but I would not like to prevent all competition, and so I would fix an income at which all people must stop. They might strive and strive if they liked, just like bells of air in a champagne glass, you know, but they should only be able to reach a certain level in the end. I would have nobody with more than 1,000*l.* a year; that would be my maximum."

"A thousand a year!" exclaimed Tita. "Isn't a thousand ten hundred?"

"Yes," said Bell, after a second's calculation.

"And suppose you have one hundred to pay for two boys at school, and another hundred for rent, and another hundred for the keep of two horses, and a hundred and twenty for servants' wages——"

"Perhaps, Tita," I suggest in the meekest possible way, "you might as well tell Count von Rosen what you pay for a leg of mutton, so that when he next

comes to dine with us he may enjoy himself the more."

It is well that the lightning which is said to dart from women's eyes is a harmless sort of thing—a flash in the pan, as it were, which is very pretty, but sends no deadly lead out. However, as Queen Tita had really behaved herself very well since we set out from Henley, I begged Bell to stop and let us in, and then I asked the Lieutenant if he would drive.

By this time we had walked the horses nearly to the end of the pleasant stretch of beechwood, which is about a mile and a half long, and before us was a bit of breezy common and the village of Nettlebed. Von Rosen took the reins and sent the horses forward.

"Why did you not continue to drive?" said Tita, rather timidly, when I had taken my seat beside her.

"Because we shall presently have to go down steep hills; and as the Count took off the bearing-reins this morning, we may as well hold him responsible for not letting the horses down."

"I thought perhaps you wanted to sit beside me," she said, in a low voice.

"Well, now you mention it, my dear, that was the reason."

"It would have been a sufficient reason a good many years ago," she said, with a fine affectation of tenderness; "but that is all over now. You have been very rude to me."

"Then don't say anything more about it: receive my forgiveness, Tita."

"That was not the way you used to speak to me when we were at Eastbourne," she said; and with that she looked very much as if she were going to cry. Of course she was not going to cry. She has had the trick of looking like that from her youth upward; but as it is really about as pretty and pathetic as the real thing, it invariably answers the same purpose. It is understood to be a signal of surrender, a sort of appeal for compassion; and so the rest of this conversation, being of a quite private nature, need not be made public.

The Count was taking us at a brisk pace across the bit of common, and then we rattled into the little clump of red-brick houses which forms the picturesque village of Nettlebed. Now if he had been struck with some recollection of the Black Forest on seeing Nettlebed Wood, imagine his surprise on finding the little inn in the village surmounted by a picture of a white deer with a royal crown on its head, a fair resemblance to the legendary creature that appeared to St. Hubertus, and that figures in so many of the Schwarzwald stories and pictures. However, we were out of Nettlebed before he could properly express his astonishment, and in the vast picture that was now opening out before us there was little that was German.

We stopped on the summit of Nuffield Heath, and found below, as far as the eye could reach, the great and fertile plain of Berkshire, with a long and irregular line of hill shutting it in on the south. In this plain of Fields as they are called—Wallingford Field, Didcot Field, Long Whittenham Field, and so on—small villages peeped out from among the green woods and pastures, where a faint blue smoke rose up into the sunshine. Here, as Bell began to expound,—for she had been reading "The Scouring of the White Horse" and various other books to which that romantic monograph had directed her,—some great deeds had happened in the olden time. Along that smooth line of hill in the south—now lying blue in the haze of the light—the Romans had cut a road which is still called the Ridgeway or Iccleton Street; and in the villages of the plain, from Pangbourne in the south-east to Shellingford in the north-west, traces of the Roman occupation were frequently found. And then, underneath that blue ridge of hill and down lay Wantage, in which King Alfred was born; and further on the ridge itself becomes Dragon's Hill, where St. George slew the beast that ravaged this fair land, and there, as all men know, is the figure of the White Horse cut on the slope to commemorate the great battle of Ashdown.

"And Ashdown, is that there also?" asked the Lieutenant.

"Well, no," said Bell, trying to remember what she had been told; "I think there is some doubt about it. King Alfred, you know, fell back from Reading, when he was beaten, but he stopped somewhere on the hills near——"

"Why not the hill we have just come up?" said the Lieutenant, with a laugh. "It is near Reading, is it not? and there you have Assenton, which is Ashenton, which is Ashendown, which is Ashdown."

"Precisely," says Tita, with a gracious smile. "All you have to do is to change John into Julius, and Smith into Cæsar, and there you are."

"But that is not fair, Tita," said Bell, turning round, and pleading quite seriously. "Assenton *is* the same as Ashendon, and that is the name of the place where the battle was fought. I think Count von Rosen is quite right."

"Well, if you think so, Bell, that settles it," said my Lady, looking rather pleased than otherwise.

And so we began to descend into this plain of many memories by a steep road that is appropriately called Gangsdown Hill. From thence a succession of undulations carried us into the green breadths of Crowmarsh Field; until, finally, we drove into the village of Bensington, and pulled up at the "Crown" there, where we proposed to have some luncheon.

"This is a village of the dead," said Tita, looking down the main thoroughfare, where not a living soul was to be seen.

But at all events a human being appeared in the yard—not a withered and silent ostler, but a stout, hale, cheerful person, whose white shirt-sleeves and gold chain proclaimed him landlord. With the aid of a small boy, he undertook to put the horses up for an hour or two; and then we went into the inn. Here we found that, as the man in the yard was at once landlord and ostler, his wife inside was landlady, cook, and waitress; and in a short space of time she had

brought us some excellent chops. Not much time was spent over the meal, for the parlour in which we sat—albeit it was a sort of museum of wonderful curiosities, and was, moreover, enlivened by the presence of a crack-voiced cockatoo—was rather small and dark. Accordingly, while the horses were having their rest, we sauntered out to have a look at Bensington.

It is probably not the dullest little village in England, but it would be hard to find a duller. There was an old shepherd with a crook in his hand and a well-worn smockfrock on his back, who was leaning over the wooden palings in front of a house, and playfully talking to a small boy who stood at an open door. With many old country people it is considered the height of raillery to alarm a boy with stories of the punishment he is about to receive for something, and to visit him with an intimation that all his sins have been found out. This old shepherd, with his withered pippin face, and his humorous grin, and his lazy arms folded on the top of the palings, was evidently enjoying himself vastly.

"A wur a-watchin' o' thee, a wur, and thy vather, he knaws, too, and he'll gie thee thy vairin wi' a good tharn stick when he comes hwom. A zah thee this marnin', my lad—thou'lt think nah one wur thear, eh?"

We left this good-natured old gentleman frightening the boy, and went round to the outskirts of the village. Here, at least, we found one explanation of the inordinate silence of Bensington—the children were all at their lessons. The door of the plain little building, which had BRITISH SCHOOL inscribed over the entrance, was open, and from within there issued a low, confused murmur. The Prussian, anxious to see something of the interior of an English school, walked up to the place; but he had just managed to cast a glance round on the rows of children when the door was politely shut in his face, and he returned, saying—

"I am not an inspector; why need they fear?"

But when, after wandering about the suburban

gardens and by-ways for a space, we returned to Bensington, we found that important village in a state of profound excitement. In the main thoroughfare a concourse of five people had assembled—three women and two children—and from the doors of the houses on both sides of the street innumerable faces, certainly not less than a dozen, were gazing forth. It is true that the people did not themselves come out—they seemed rather to shrink from courting publicity; but they were keenly alive to what was going on, and Bensington had become excited.

For there had appeared in the main street a little, dry, odd old man, who was leading a small donkey-cart, and who was evidently rather the worse for liquor. He was a seller of peas. He had summoned the inhabitants to come out and buy the peas, and he was offering them at what we were told were very reasonable terms. But just as the old man was beginning to enjoy the receipt of customs, there drove into the place a sharp, brisk, middle-aged man, with a shiny face, a fine presence, and a ringing voice. This man had a neat cart, a handsome pony, and his name was printed in large letters, so that all could read. He was also a seller of peas. Now, although this rude and ostentatious owner of the pony was selling his produce at fourpence, while the humble proprietor of the donkey sold his at threepence, the women recalled their children and bade them go to the dearer market. There was something in the appearance of the man, in the neatness of his cart, and in the ringing cheerfulness of his voice, which told you he sold good peas. This was the cause of the great perturbation in Bensington; for no sooner did the half-tipsy old man see that his rival was carrying the day before him than he leaned his arms over his donkey's head, and began to make ironical comments on his enemy and on the people of Bensington. He was apparently in the best of spirits. You would have thought it delighted him to see the small girls come timidly forward to him, and then be warned away by a cry from their mothers

that they were to go to the other cart. Nay, he went the length of advertising his neighbour's wares. He addressed the assembled multitudes—by this time there were nearly fifteen people visible in Bensington—and told them he wouldn't sell his peas if he was to get a fortune for them.

"Pay your foppence," he said to them, in accents which showed he was not of Bensington born, "there are yer right good peas. It's all along o' my donkey as you'll not take mine, though they're only thrippence. I wouldn't sell. I won't sell this day. Take back yer money. I won't sell my peas at a crown apiece—darned if I do!"

And with that he left his donkey and went over to the proprietor of the pony. He was not in a fighting mood—not he. He challenged his rival to run the pony against the donkey, and offered to bet the donkey would be in London a week before the other. The man in the cart took no notice of these sallies. In a brisk, practical, methodical fashion, he was measuring out his peas, and handing them down to the uplifted bowls that surrounded him. Sometimes he grinned in a good-natured way at the facetious remarks of his unfortunate antagonist; but all the same he stuck to his business and drove a thriving trade. How there came to be on that afternoon so many people in Bensington who wished to buy peas must remain a mystery.

"And now," said Bell, as we once more got into the phaeton, "we shall be in Oxford in two hours. Do you think the post-office will be open?"

"Very likely," said Tita, with some surprise; "but do you expect letters already, Bell?"

"You cannot tell," said the young lady, with just a shade of embarrassment, "how soon Kate may send letters after us. And she knows we are to stop a day at Oxford. It will not be too dark to go hunting for the post-office, will it?"

"But you shall not go," said the Lieutenant, giving a shake to the reins, as if in obedience to Bell's wish.

"When you have got to the hotel, I will go and get your letters for you."

"Oh no, thank you," said Bell, in rather a hurried and anxious way. "I should prefer much to go for them myself, thank you."

That was all that was said on the subject; and Bell, we noticed, was rather silent for the first few miles of our afternoon drive. The Lieutenant did his best to amuse her, and carried on a lively conversation chiefly by himself. That mention of letters seemed to have left Bell rather serious; and she was obviously not over-delighted at the prospect of reaching Oxford.

The road from Bensington thither is pleasant enough, but not particularly interesting. For the most part it descends by a series of undulations into the level plain watered by the Isis, the Cherwell, and the Thames. But the mere notion of approaching that famous city, which is consecrated with memories of England's greatest men —statesmen and divines, melancholy philosophers and ill-starred poets—is in itself impressive, and lends to the rather common-place landscape an air of romance. While as yet the old town lies unseen amid the woods that crowd up to the very edge of the sky, one fancies the bells of the colleges are to be heard, as Pope heard them when he rode, a solitary horseman, over these very hills, and down into the plain, and up to Magdalen Bridge.[1] We cared little to look at the villages, strung like beads on the winding thread of the road—Shellingford, Dorchester, Nuneham Courtenay, and Sandford—nor did we even turn aside to go down to Iffley and the Thames. It was seven when we drew near Oxford. There were people sauntering out from the town to have their evening walk. When, at last, we stopped to pay toll in front of the old lichen-covered bridge across the Cherwell, the tower of Magdalen College, and the magnificent elms on the other side of the way, had caught a tinge of red from the dusky sunset, and

[1] "Nothing could have more of that melancholy which once used to please me, than my last day's journey; for after having passed through my favourite woods in the forest, with a thousand reveries of

there was a faint reflection of crimson down on the still waters that lay among the rank green meadows. Then we drove on into the High Street, and here, in the gathering dusk, the yellow lamps were beginning to glimmer. Should we pull up at the Angel—that famous hostelry of ancient times, whose name used to be inscribed on so many notable coaches? "We put up at the Angel Inn," writes Mr. Boswell, "and passed the evening by ourselves in easy and familiar conversation." Alas! the Angel has now been pulled down. Or shall we follow the hero of the Splendid Shilling, who,

> "When nightly mists arise,
> To Juniper's Magpie or Town Hall repairs?"

They, too, are gone. But as Castor and Pollux, during these moments of doubt and useless reminiscence, are still taking us over the rough stones of the "High," some decision must be come to; and so, at a sudden instigation, Count von Rosen pulls up in front of the Mitre, which is an appropriate sign for the High Street of Oxford, and betokens age and respectability.

The stables of the Mitre are clean, well-ventilated, and well-managed—indeed, no better stables could have been found for putting up the horses for their next day's rest. When we had seen to their comfort, we returned to the inn, and found that my Lady and Bell had not only had all the luggage conveyed to our respective rooms, but had ordered dinner, changed their attire, and

past pleasures, I rid over hanging hills, whose tops were edged with groves, and whose feet watered with winding rivers, listening to the falls of cataracts below, and the murmuring of the winds above; the gloomy verdure of Stonor succeeded to these, and then the shades of evening overtook me. The moon rose in the clearest sky I ever saw, by whose solemn light I paced on slowly, without company, or any interruption to the range of my thoughts. About a mile before I reached Oxford, all the bells tolled in different notes; the clocks of every college answered one another and sounded forth (some in deeper, some in a softer tone) that it was eleven at night. All this was no ill preparation to the life I have led since among those old walls, venerable galleries, stone porticoes, studious walks, and solitary scenes of the University."—*Pope to Mrs. Martha Blount.* [Stonor Park lies about two miles to the right of Bix turnpike.]

were waiting for us in the square, old-fashioned, low-roofed coffee-room which looks out into the High Street. A tall waiter was laying the cloth for us; the lights were lit all round the wall; our only companions were two elderly gentlemen who sat in a remote corner, and gave themselves up to politics; and Bell, having resolved to postpone her inquiry about letters until next morning—in obedience to the very urgent entreaties of the Lieutenant—seemed all the more cheerful for that resolution.

But if our two friends by the fire-place could not overhear our talk, we could overhear theirs; and all the time we sat at dinner, we were receiving a vast amount of enlightenment about the condition of the country. The chief spokesman was a short, stout person, with a fresh, healthy, energetic face, keen grey eyes, bushy grey whiskers, a bald head, and a black satin waistcoat; his companion a taller and thinner man, with straight black hair, sallow cheeks, and melancholy dark eyes: and the former, in a somewhat pompous manner, was demonstrating the blindness of ordinary politicians to the wrath that was to come. Lord Palmerston saw it, he said. There was no statesman ever like Lord Palmerston—there would never be his like again. For was not the North bound to fight the South in every country? And what should we do if the men of the great manufacturing towns were to come down on us? There were two Englands in this island—and the Westminster Houses knew nothing of the rival camps that were being formed. And did not the North always beat the South? Did not Rome beat Carthage? and the Huns the Romans? and the Northern States the Southern States? and Prussia Austria? and Germany France? And when the big-limbed and determined men of Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester, Preston, Newcastle, and such towns, rose to sweep aside the last feudal institutions of this country, of what avail would be a protest on the part of the feeble and self-indulgent South?

"This kingdom, Sir," said the gentleman with the satin waistcoat and gold seals, in such lofty tones that

Count von Rosen scarcely minded his dinner,—"this kingdom, Sir, is more divided at this moment than it was during the Wars of the Roses. It is split into hostile factions; and which is the more patriotic? Neither. There is no patriotism left—only the selfishness of class. We care no more for the country as a country. We are cosmopolitan. The scepticism of the first French Revolution has poisoned our big towns. We tolerate a monarchy as a harmless toy. We tolerate an endowed priesthood, because we think they cannot make our peasantry more ignorant than they are. We allow pauperism to increase and eat into the heart of the State, because we think it no business of ours to interfere. We see our lowest classes growing up to starve or steal, in ignorance and dirt; our middle classes scrambling for wealth to get out of the state they were born in; our upper classes given over to luxury and debauchery—patriotism gone—continental nations laughing at us—our army a mere handful of men with incompetent officers—our navy made the subject of destructive experiments by interested cliques—our Government ready to seize on the most revolutionary schemes to get together a majority and remain in power—selfishness, incompetence, indifference become paramount—it is horrible, Sir, it is Orrible."

In his anxiety to be emphatic, he left out that one "h;" it was his only slip. Our Lieutenant turned to Tita, and said:

"I have met many English people in Germany who have spoken to me like that. They do seem to have a pride in criticising themselves and their country. Is it because they feel they are so strong, and so rich, and so good, that they can afford to dispraise themselves? Is it because they feel themselves so very safe in this island that they think little of patriotism, yes? But I have observed this thing—that when it is a foreigner who begins to say such things of England, your countryman he instantly changes his tone. He may say himself bad things of his country; but he will not allow anyone else. That is very good—very right. But I would

rather have a Frenchman who is very vain of his country, and says so at every moment, than an Englishman who is very vain and pretends to disparage it. The Frenchman is more honest."

"But there are many Englishmen who think England wants great improvements," said Tita.

"Improvements! Yes. But it is another thing you hear so many Englishmen say, that their country is all wrong—'going to the dogs' is what you say for that. Well, they do not believe it true—it is impossible to be true; and they do not look well with us foreigners when they say so. For myself, I like to see a man proud of his country, whatever country it is; and if my country were England, do not you think I should be proud of her great history, and her great men, and her powers of filling the world with colonies, and—what I think most of all—her courage in making the country free to every man, and protecting opinions that she herself does not believe, because it is right? When my countrymen hear Englishmen talk like that, they cannot understand."

You should have seen our Bell's face—the pride and the gratitude that were in her eyes, while she did not speak.

"You would not have us go about praising ourselves for doing right?" said Tita.

"No," he said, "but you ought not to go about professing yourselves to be less satisfied with your country than you are."

Before breaking up for the night, we came to a reckoning about our progress, and probable line of route. Fifty-eight miles—that was the exact distance, by straight road, we had got on our way to Scotland at the end of the third day.

"And to-morrow," said Tita, as she finished giving the Lieutenant his first lesson in bezique, "counts for nothing, as we remain here. Fifty-eight miles in three days looks rather small, does it not? But I suppose we shall get there in course of time."

"Yes," said Bell, gently, as she put the markers straight, "in Pollux' course of time."

My Lady rose, and in her severest tones ordered the girl to bed.

[*Note by Queen Titania.*—"If these jottings of our journey come to be published, I beg to say that, so far as I appear in them, they are a little unfair. I hope I am not so very terrible a person as all that comes to. I have noticed in some *other* families that a man of *obstinate will* and of *uncertain temper* likes nothing so much as to pretend to his friends that he suffers dreadfully from the tyranny of his wife. It is merely self-complacency. He knows no one dares thwart him; and so he thinks it rather humorous to give himself the air of being much injured, and of being very good-natured. I dare say, however, most people who look at these memoranda will be able to decide whether the trifling misunderstandings—which have been much exaggerated and made to look *serious*—were owing to me. But as for Bell, I do not think it right to joke about her position at all. She does her best to keep up her spirits—and she is a brave, good girl, who likes to be cheerful if only for the sake of those around her; but this affair of Arthur Ashburton is causing her *deep anxiety* and a good deal of vexation. Why she should have some vague impression that she has treated him badly, I cannot see; for the very reverse is the case. But surely it is unfair to make this *lovers' quarrel* the pretext for dragging Bell into a wild romance, which the writer of the foregoing pages seems bent on doing. Indeed, with regard to this subject, I cannot do better than repeat a conversation which, with *characteristic ingenuity*, he has entirely omitted. He said to me, while we were wandering about Bensington—and Bell had strolled on with Count von Rosen—

"'After all, our phaeton is not a microcosm. We have not the complete elements for a romance. We have no villain with us.'

"'You flatter yourself,' I remarked; which did not seem to please him, but he pretended not to hear.

"'There will be no dark background to our adventures—no crime, secrecy, plotting, or malicious thwarting of Bell's happiness. It will be like a magic-lantern slide with all the figures painted in rose-colour.'

"'What do you mean by Bell's happiness?' I asked.

"'Her marriage with the Lieutenant, and there is no villain to oppose it. Even if we had a villain, there is no room for him: the phaeton only holds four comfortably.'

"Really this was too much. I could scarcely control my *impatience* with such folly. I have said before that the girl does not wish to marry anyone; but if there were any thought of marriage in her mind, surely her anxiety about that letter points *in a different way*. Of course I was immediately taunted with scheming to throw Bell and Count von Rosen together during our drive. I admit that I did so, and mean to do so. We ought not to expect young folks to be always delighted with the society of their elders. It is only natural that these two young people should become companions; but what of that? And as to the speech about a villain, who ever saw one? Out of a novel or a play, I never saw a villain, and I don't know anybody who ever did. It seems to me there is a good deal of self-satisfaction in the notion that we four are all so *angelic* that it wants some disagreeable person to throw us into relief. Are we all painted in rose-colour? Looking back over these pages, I do not think so; but I am not

surprised—considering *who had the wielding of the brush.* And yet I think we have so far enjoyed ourselves very well, considering that I am supposed to be very hard to please, and very quarrelsome. Perhaps none of us are so amiable as we ought to be; and yet we manage to put up with one another somehow. In the meantime, I am grieved to see Bell, without the intervention of any villain whatever, undergoing great anxiety; and I wish the girl had sufficient courage to sit down at once and write to Arthur Ashburton and absolutely forbid him to do anything so foolish as seek an interview with her. If he should do so, it is impossible to say what may come of it, for our Bell has a good deal of pride with all her gentleness.—T."]

## CHAPTER VII.

### ATRA CURA.

"O gentle wind that bloweth south,
To where my love repaireth,
Convey a kiss to his dear mouth,
And tell me how he fareth!"

"My dear, you are unphilosophical. Why should you rebuke Bell for occasionally using one of those quaint American phrases, which have wandered into this country? I can remember a young person who had a great trick of quoting Italian—especially in moments of tenderness—but that was a long time ago—and perhaps she has forgotten——"

"It is shameful of you," says Queen Titania, hastily, "to encourage Bell in that way. She would never do anything of the kind but for you. And you know very well that quoting a foreign language is quite a different thing from using those stupid Americanisms which are only fit for negro-concerts."

"My dear, you are unphilosophical. When America started in business on her own account, she forgot to furnish herself with an independent language; but ever since she has been working hard to supply the want. By and by you will find an American language—sharp, concise, expressive—built on the diffuse and heavy foundations of our own English. Why should not Bell use those tentative phrases which convey so much in so

few syllables? Why call it slang? What is slang but an effort at conciseness?"

Tita looked puzzled, vexed, and desperate: and inadvertently turned to Count von Rosen, who was handing the sugar-basin to Bell. He seemed to understand the appeal, for he immediately said—

"Oh, but you do know, that is not the objection. I do not think Mademoiselle talks in that way, or should be criticised about it by anyone; but the wrong that is done by introducing the slang words is, that it destroys the history of a language. It perverts the true meaning of roots—it takes away the poetry of derivations—it confuses the student."

"And who thought of students when the various objects in life were named? And whence came the roots? And is not language always an experiment, producing fresh results as people find it convenient, and leaving students to frame laws as they like? And why are we to give up succinct words or phrases because the dictionaries of the last generation consecrated them to a particular use? My dear children, the process of inventing language goes on from year to year, changing, modifying, supplying, and building up new islands out of the common sand and the sea. What to-day is slang, to-morrow is language, if one may be permitted to parody Feuerbach. And I say that Bell, having an accurate ear for fit sounds, shall use such words as she likes; and if she can invent epithets of her own——"

"But, please, I don't wish to do anything of the kind," says Bell, looking quite shamefaced.

That is just the way of those women: interfere to help them in a difficulty, and they straightway fly over to the common enemy, especially if he happens to represent a social majority.

I began to perceive about this stage of our journey that a large number of small articles over which Bell had charge were now never missing. Whenever she wanted a map, or a guide-book, or any one of the things which had been specially entrusted to her, it was forth-

coming directly. Nay, she never had, like Tita, to look for a hat, or a shawl, or a scarf, or a packet of bezique-cards. I also began to notice that when she missed one of those things, she somehow inadvertently turned to our Lieutenant, who was quite sure to know where it was, and to hand it to her on the instant. The consequence on this morning was, that when we all came down prepared to go out for an exploration of Oxford, we found Bell at the window of the coffee-room, already dressed, and looking placidly out into the High Street, where the sunlight was shining down on the top of the old-fashioned houses opposite, and on the brand-new bank, which, as a compliment to the prevailing style of the city, has been built in very distinguished Gothic.

It was proposed that we should first go down and have a look at Christ Church.

"And that will just take us past the post-office," said Bell.

"Why, how do you know that? Have you been out?" asked Titania.

"No," replied Bell, simply. "But Count von Rosen told me where it was."

"Oh, I have been all over the town this morning," said the Lieutenant, carelessly. "It is the finest town that I have yet seen—a sort of Gothic Munich, but old, very old—not new, and white like Munich, where the streets are asking you to look at their fine buildings. And I have been down to the river—that is very fine, too—even the appearance of the old colleges and buildings from the meadows—that is wonderful."

"Have you made any other discoveries this morning?" said Queen Tita, with a gracious smile.

"Yes," said the young man, lightly. "I have discovered that the handsome young waiter who gave us our breakfast—that he has been a rider in a circus, which I did suspect myself, from his manner and attitudes—and also an actor. He is a very fine man, but not much spirit. I was asking him this morning why he is not a soldier. He despises that, because you pay a shilling a day. That is a pity your soldiers are

not—what shall I say?—respectable; that your best young men do not like to go with them, and become under-officers. But I do not know he is very good stuff for a soldier—he smiles too much, and makes himself pleasant. Perhaps that is only because he is a waiter."

"Have you made any other acquaintances this morning?" says Tita, with a friendly amusement in her eyes.

"No, no one—except the old gentleman who did talk politics last night. He is gone away by the train to Birmingham."

"Pray when do you get up in the morning?"

"I did not look that; but there was no one in the streets when I went out, as there would be in a German town; and even now there is a great dulness. I have inquired about the students—they are all gone home—it is a vacation. And a young lady in a book-shop told me that there is no life in the town when the students are gone—that all places close early—that even the milliners' shops are closed just now at half-past seven, while they are open till nine when the students are here."

"And what," says my Lady, with a look of innocent wonder, "what have the students to do with milliners' shops that such places should be kept open on *their* account?"

No one could offer a sufficient solution of this problem; and so we left the coffee-room and plunged into the glare of the High Street.

It would be useless to attempt here any detailed account of that day's long and pleasant rambling through Oxford. To anyone who knows the appearance and the associations of the grand old city—who is familiar with the various mass of crumbling colleges, and quiet cloisters, and grassy quadrangles—who has wandered along the quaint clean streets that look strangely staid and orthodox, and are as old as the splendid elms that break in continually on the lines and curves of the prevailing architecture—to one who has even seen the city at a distance, with its many spires and turrets set amid fair green meadows, and girt about with the silver windings

of streams—any such brief recapitulation would be wholly bald and useless; while he to whom Oxford is unknown can learn nothing of its beauties and impressions without going there. Our party absolutely refused to go sight-seeing, and were quite content to accept the antiquarian researches of the guide-books on credit. It was enough for us to ramble leisurely through the old courts and squares and alleys, where the shadows lay cool under the gloomy walls, or under avenues of magnificent elms.

But first of all we paid a more formal visit to Christ Church, and on our way thither the Lieutenant stopped Bell at the post-office. She begged leave to ask for letters herself; and presently reappeared with two in her hand.

"These are from the boys," she said to my Lady: "there is one for you, and one for Papa."

"You have had no letter?" said Tita.

"No," answered Bell, somewhat gravely as I fancied; and for some time after she seemed rather thoughtful and anxious.

As we paused underneath the archway in front of the sunlit quadrangle of Christ Church, the letters from the boys were read aloud. This is the first one, which shows the pains a boy will take to write properly to his mother, especially when he can lay his hands on some convenient guide-book to correspondence:—

"Cowley House, Twickenham.

"My dear Mamma,—I take up my pen to let you know that I am quite well, and hope that this will find you in the engoyment of good health. My studdies are advancing favably, and I hope I shall continue to please my teacher and my dear parents, who have been so kind to me, and are anxious for my wellfare. I look foward with much delight to the aproarching hollidays, and I am, my dear Mamma,

"Your affectionate Son,

"Jack.

"P.S.—He does gallop so; and he eats beans."

Master Tom, on the other hand, showed that the fear of his mother was not on him when he sat down to write. Both of them had evidently just been impressed with the pony's galloping; for the second letter was as follows:—

"Cowley House, Twickenham.

"My dear Papa,—He does gallop so, you can't think [this phrase, as improper, was hastily scored through] and I took him down to the river and the boys were very Impertinent and I rode him down to the river and they had to run away from their clothes and he went into the river a good bit and was not afraid but you know he cannot swim yet as he is very young Harry French says and Doctor Ashburton went with us yesterday my dear papa to the ferry and Dick was taken over in the ferry and we all went threw the trees by Ham House and up to Ham Common and back by Richmond bridge and Dick was not a bit Tired. But what do you think my dear papa Doctor Ashburton says all our own money won't pay for his hay and corn and he will starve if you do not send some please my dear papa to send some at once because if he starvves once he will not get right again and the Ostler says he is very greedy but he his a very good pony and very intelgent dear papa Doctor Ashburton has bawt us each a riding-whip but I never hit him over the ears which the Ostler says is dangerus and you must tell the German gentleman that Jack and I are very much obled [scored out] obledg [also scored out] obbliged to him, and send our love to him and to dear Auntie Bell and to dear Mamma and I am my dear papa your affexnate son.

"Tom."

"It is really disgraceful," said the mother of the scamps, "the shocking way those boys spell. Really Doctor Ashburton must be written to. At their age, and with such letters as these—it is shameful."

"I think they are very clever boys," said Bell, "and

I hope you won't impose extra lessons on them just as they have got a pony."

"They ought not to have had the pony until they had given a better account of themselves at school," said my Lady, severely; to which Bell only replied by saying, in a pensive manner, that she wished she was a boy of nine years of age, just become possessed of a pony, and living in the country.

We spent a long time in Christ Church, more especially in the magnificent Hall, where the historical portraits greatly interested Bell. She entered into surmises as to the sensations which must have been felt by the poets and courtiers of Queen Elizabeth's time when they had to pay compliments to the thin-faced, red-haired woman who is here represented in her royal satins and pearls; and wondered whether, after they had celebrated her as the Queen of Beauty, they afterwards reconciled these flatteries to their conscience by looking on them as sarcasm. But whereas Bell's criticism of the picture was quite gentle and unprejudiced, there was a good deal more of acerbity in the tone in which Queen Tita drew near to speak of Holbein's Henry VIII. My firm belief is, that the mother of those two boys at Twickenham, if she only had the courage of her opinions—and dared to reveal those secret sentiments which now find expression in decorating our bedrooms with missal-like texts, and in the use of Ritualistic phrases to describe ordinary portions of the service and ordinary days of the year—would really be discovered to be——but let that pass. What harm Henry VIII. had done her, I could not make out. Anyone may perceive that that monarch has not the look of an ascetic; that the contour of his face and the setting of his eyes are not particularly pleasing; that he could not easily be mistaken for Ignatius Loyola. But why any woman of these present days, who subscribes to Mudie's, watches the costumes of the Princess of Wales, and thinks that Dr. Pusey has been ungenerously treated, should regard a portrait

of Henry VIII. as though he had done her an injury only the week before last, it is not easy to discover. Bell, on the other hand, was discoursing to the Lieutenant about the various workmanship of the pictures, and giving him a vast amount of information about technical matters, in which he appeared to take a deep interest.

"But did you ever paint upon panel yourself, Mademoiselle?" he asked.

"Oh yes," said Bell, "I was at one time very fond of it. But I never made it so useful as a countryman of mine once suggested it might be. He was a Cumberland farmer who had come down to our house at Ambleside; and when he saw me painting on a piece of wood, he looked at it with great curiosity.

"'Heh, lass,' he said, 'thou's pentin a fine pictur there, and on wood, too. Is't for the yell-house?'

"No,' I said, explaining that I was painting for my own pleasure, and that it was not a public-house sign.

"'To please thysel, heh? And when thou's dune wi' the pictur, thou canst plane it off the wood, and begin another—that's thy meanin', is't?'

"I was very angry with him, for I was only about fifteen then, and I wanted to send my picture to a London exhibition."

"Why, I did see it down at Leatherhead!" said Von Rosen. "Was not that the picture, on panel, near the window of the dining-room?"

"Come, come!" said Titania to the girl, who could not quite conceal the pleasure she felt on hearing that the Count had noticed this juvenile effort of hers; "come along, and let us see the library before we go into the open air again."

In the library, too, were more portraits and pictures, in which these young people were much interested. We found it impossible to drag them along. They would loiter in some corner or other, and then, when we forsook our civil attendant and went back for

them, we found them deeply engrossed in some obscure portrait or buried in a huge parchment-bound folio which the Lieutenant had taken out and opened. Bell was a fairly well-informed young woman, as times go, and knew quite as much of French literature as was good for her; but it certainly puzzled Tita and myself to discover what possible interest she could have in gazing upon the large pages of the Encyclopædia, while the Lieutenant talked to her about D'Alembert. Nor could it be possible that a young lady of her years and pursuits had imbibed so much reverence for original editions as to stand entranced before this or that well-known author whose earliest offspring had been laid hold of by her companion. They both seemed unwilling to leave this library; but Von Rosen explained the matter when he came out—saying that he had never felt so keenly the proverbial impulses of an Uhlan as when he found himself with these valuable old books in his hand and only one attendant near. I congratulated the authorities of Christ Church on what they had escaped.

Of course we went down to the river some little time after lunch; and had a look from Folly Bridge on the various oddly-assorted crews that had invaded the sacred waters of the Isis in the absence of the University men. When the Lieutenant proposed that we, too, should get a boat and make a voyage down between the green meadows, it almost seemed as if we were venturing into a man's house in the absence of the owner; but then Bell very prettily and urgently added her supplications, and Tita professed herself not unwilling to give the young folks an airing on the stream. There were plenty of signs that it was vacation-time besides the appearance of the nondescript oarsmen. There was a great show of painting and scraping and gilding visible among that long line of mighty barges that lay under the shadow of the elms, moored to tall white poles that sent a line of silver down into the glassy and troubled water beneath. Barges in blue, and barges in cream and gold, barges

with splendid prows and Gorgon figure-heads, barges with steam-paddles and light awnings over the upper deck, barges with that deck supported by pointed arches, as if a bit of an old cloister had been carried down to decorate a pleasure-boat—all these resounded to the blows of hammers, and were being made bright with many colours. The University barge itself had been dragged out of the water, and was also undergoing the same process; although the cynical person who had put the cushions in our boat had just remarked, with something of a shrug—

"I hope that the mahn as has got the job 'll get paid for it, for the 'Varsity Crew are up to their necks in debt, that's what they are!"

When once we had got away from Christ Church meadows, there were fewer obstructions in our course; but whether it was that the currents of the river defied the skill of our coxswain, or whether it was that the Lieutenant and Bell, sitting together in the stern, were too much occupied in pointing out to each other the beauties of the scenery, we found ourselves with a fatal frequency running into the bank, with the prow of the boat hissing through the rushes and flags. Nevertheless, we managed to get up to Iffley, and there, having moored the boat, we proceeded to land and walk up to the old church on the brow of the hill.

"It's what they calls eerly English," said the old lady who showed us over the ancient building. She was not a talkative person; she was accustomed to get over the necessary information rapidly; and then spent the interval in looking strangely at the tall Lieutenant and his brown beard. She did not betray any emotion when a small gratuity was given her. She had not even said "Thank you" when Von Rosen, on calling for the keys of the church, had found the gate of her garden unhinged, and had laboured fully ten minutes in hammering a rusty piece of iron into the wooden post. Perhaps she thought it was Bell who had driven down the gate;

but at all events she expressed no sense of gratitude for its restoration.

Near an old yew-tree there was a small grave—new-made and green with grass—on which some careful hand had placed a cross composed exclusively of red and white roses. This new grave, with these fresh evidences of love and kindly remembrance on it, looked strange in the rude old churchyard, where stones of unknown age and obliterated names lay tumbled about or stood awry among the weeds and grass. Yet this very disorder and decay, as Tita said gently, seemed to her so much more pleasant than the cold and sharp precision of the iron crosses in French and German grave-yards, with their grim, fantastic decorations and wreaths of immortelles. She stood looking at this new grave and its pretty cross of roses, and at the green and weather-worn stones, and at the black old yew-tree, for some little time; until Bell—who knows of something that happened when Tita was but a girl, and her brother scarcely more than a child—drew her gently away from us, towards the gate of the churchyard.

"Yes," said the Lieutenant, not noticing, but turning to the only listener remaining; "that is true. I think your English churchyards in the country are very beautiful—very picturesque—very pathetic indeed. But what you have not in this country are the beautiful songs about death that we have—not religious hymns, or anything like that—but small, little poems that the country-people know and repeat to their children. Do you know that one that says—

Hier schlummert das Herz,
Befreit von betäubenden Sorgen;
Es weckt uns kein Morgen
Zu grösserem Schmerz.

And it ends this way—

Was weinest denn du?
Ich trage nun muthig mein Leiden,
Und rufe mit Freuden,
Im Grabe ist Ruh'!

There was one of my comrades in the war—he was from my native place, but not in my regiment—he was a very good fellow—and when he was in the camp before Metz, his companion was killed. Well, he buried him separate from the others, and went about till he got somewhere a gravestone, and he began to cut out, just with the end of a bayonet, these two verses on the stone. It took him many weeks to do that; and I did hear from one of my friends in the regiment that two days after he had put up the stone, he was himself killed. Oh, it is very hard to have your companion killed beside you, and he is away from his friends, and when you go back home without him—they look at you as if you had no right to be alive and their son dead. That is very hard—I knew it in Sixty-six, when I went back to Berlin, and had to go to see old Madame von Hebel. I do hope never to have that again."

Is there a prettier bit of quiet river-scenery in the world than that around Iffley Mill? Or was it merely the glamour of the white day that rendered the place so lovely, and made us linger in the open stream to look at the mill and its surroundings? As I write, there lies before me a pencil sketch of our Bell's, lightly dashed here and there with water-colour, and the whole scene is recalled. There is the dilapidated old stone building, with its red tiles, its crumbling plaster, its wooden projections, and small windows, half-hidden amid foliage. Further down the river there are clumps of rounded elms visible; but here around the mill the trees are chiefly poplars, of magnificent height, that stretch up lightly and gracefully into a quiet yellow sky, and throw gigantic lines of reflection down into the still water. Then out from the mill a small island runs into the stream; the woodwork of the sluice-gates bridges the interval; there is a red cow amid the green leafage of the island, and here again are some splendid poplars, rising singly up from the river-side. Then beyond is another house, then a wooden bridge, and a low line of

trees; and finally the river, in a sharp curve, glimmers in the light and loses itself behind low-lying meadows and a marginal growth of willow and flag.

For very shame's sake, the big Lieutenant was forced to offer to take Tita's oar, as we once more proceeded on our voyage; but she definitely refused to endanger our lives by any such experiment. A similar offer on the part of Bell met with a similar fate. Indeed, when this little woman has once made up her mind to do a certain thing, the reserve of physical and intellectual vigour that lies within the slight frame and behind a smooth and gentle face, shows itself to be extraordinary. Place before her some arithmetical conundrum that she must solve in order to question the boys, or give her an oar and engage her to pull for a certain number of miles, and the amount of patient perseverance and unobtrusive energy she will reveal will astonish most people. In the meantime, her task was easy. We were going with the stream. And so we glided on between the green banks, under the railway-bridge, past the village of Kennington, past Rose Isle, with its bowers, and tables, and beer-glasses, and lounging young fellows in white trousers and blue jackets, and so on until we got up to Sandford Lock. Here, also, we fastened the boat to the bank, close by the mill, and went ashore for half an hour's stroll. But while Tita made direct, as she generally does on entering a new village, for the church, the Lieutenant went off in quest of beer; and when we came back to the boat, he had a wonderful story to tell us. He had made friends with some innkeeper or other, and had imbibed from him a legend which was a curious mixture of fact and inference and blunder. Von Rosen had doubtless mistaken much of the Oxfordshire *patois;* for how could any man make a reasonable narrative out of the following?—

"And he told me it was a farmer's house in the village—the village of Sandford, I suppose—and while

they took it down to repair it, they were lifting up the floors, and many strange things were there. And he said, among the nonsense and useless rubbish they were finding there, was a hat; and the man brought the hat down to him; and he saw it was a chevalier's hat——"

"A cavalier's hat," suggested Bell; and the Lieutenant assented.

"Then the farmer went up to the house, and he found some hidden letters, and one was to Ettrick—to some soldier who was then on a campaign at the river Ettrick in the north. And they found that it was in this very house that King Charles the First did cut off his beard and moustache—I suppose when he was flying from the Parliamentary army; but I am forgetting all about that history now, and the innkeeper was not sure about the battle. Well, then the news was sent to London; and a gentleman came down who is the only surviving descender—descendant—of King Charles, and he took away the hat to London, and you will find it in the British Museum. It is a very curious story, and I would have come after you, and showed you the house; but I suppose, it is a new house now, and nothing to look at. But do you know when the king was in this neighbourhood in escaping?"

Here was a poser for the women.

"I don't remember," says Tita, looking very profound, "to have seen anything about Oxford in Lord Clarendon's narrative of the king's escape after the battle of Worcester."

"Mamma!" said Bell, in accents of reproach, "that was Charles the Second."

"To be sure it was," returned Tita, with a gesture of impatience; "and he couldn't have come this way, for he went to Bristol. But Charles the First was continually at Oxford—he summoned the Parliament to meet him here——"

"And shaved off his beard to curry favour with them," it is suggested.

"You needn't laugh. Of course, when he was finally defeated he fled from Oxford, and very probably disguised himself."

"And when did he fly, and whither?"

"To Scotland," said Bell triumphantly, "and after the battle of Naseby."

"Good girl. And where is Naseby?"

"Well, if he fled north-east from the Parliamentary army, Naseby must be in the south-west; and so I suppose it is somewhere down about Gloucester."

"Herr Professor Oswald, where is Naseby?"

"I do not know," says the Lieutenant; "but I think it is more in the north, and not far from the country of your great man Hampden. But he was killed before then, I think."

"And pray," says Queen Tita, taking her seat, and putting her oar into the rowlock, "will you please tell me what you think of those men—of Cromwell and Hampden and those—and what your historians say of them in Germany?"

"Why, they say all kinds of things about them," said the Lieutenant, lightly—not knowing that he was being questioned as a representative of the feudal aristocracy of a country in which the divine right of kings is supposed to flourish—"just as your historians do here. But we know very well that England has got much of her liberty through that fight with the king, and yet you have been able to keep a balance, and not let the lowest classes run riot and destroy your freedom. They were ambitious? Yes. If a man is in politics, does not he fight hard to make his side win? If he is a soldier, does not he like to be victorious? And if I could be King of England, do you not think I should like that very well, and try hard for it? But if these men had their own ambitions, and wanted to get fame and honour, I am sure they had much of righteousness and belief, and would not have fought in that way and overturned the king if they believed that was an injury to their country or to their religion. And besides what could

this man or that man have done except he had a great enthusiasm of the nation behind him—if he did not represent a principle? But I have no right to speak of such things as if I were telling you of our German historians. That is only my guess, and I have read not much about it. But you must not suppose that because we in Germany have not the same political system that you have, that we cannot tell the value of yours, and the good it has done to the character of your people. Our German historians are many of them professors in universities, and they spend their lives in finding out the truth of such things; and do you think they care what may be the opinion of their own government about it? Oh, no. They are very independent in the universities—much too independent, I think. It is very pleasant when you are a very young man, to get into a university, and think yourself very wise, and go to extremes about politics, and say hard things of your own country; but when you come out into the world, and see how you have to keep your country from enemies that are not separated by the sea from you (as you are here in England), you see how bad are these principles among young men, who do not like to be obedient, and always want to hurry on new systems of government before such things are possible. But you do not see much of those wild opinions when a war comes, and the young men are marched together to save their country. Then they forget all the democratic notions of this kind—it is their heart that speaks, and it is on fire—and not one is ashamed to be patriotic, though he may have laughed at it a week before."

"It must be very hard," said Bell, looking away at the river, "to leave your home and go into a foreign country, and know that you may never return."

"Oh, no; not much," said the Lieutenant; "for all your friends go with you. And you are not always in danger—you have much entertainment at times,

especially when some fight is over, and all your friends meet again to have a supper in the tent, and some one has got a bottle of cognac, and some one else has got a letter from home, full of gossip about people you know very well. And there is much fun, too, in riding over the country, and trying to find food and quarters for yourself and your horse. We had many good parties in the deserted farmhouses, and sometimes we caught a hen or a duck that the people had neglected to take, and then we kindled a big fire, and killed him, and fixed him on a lance and roasted him well, feathers and all. Then we were very lucky—to have a fire, and good meat, and a roof to keep off the rain. But it was more dangerous in a house—for it was difficult to keep from sleeping after you had got warm and had eaten and drunk perhaps a little too much wine—and there were many people about ready to fire at you. But these are not heroic stories of a campaign, are they, Mademoiselle?"

Nevertheless, Mademoiselle seemed sufficiently interested; and as Tita and I pulled evenly back to Iffley and Oxford, she continually brought the Lieutenant back to this subject by a series of questions. This modern maiden was as anxious to hear of the amusements of patrols, and the hair-breadth escapes of dare-devil sub-lieutenants, as was Desdemona to listen to her lover's stories of battles, sieges, fortunes, and moving accidents by flood and field.

That was a pleasant pull back to Oxford, in the quiet of the summer afternoon, with the yellow light lying warmly over the level meadows and the woods. There were more people now along the banks of the river—come out for the most part in couples to wander along the pathway between the stream and the fields. Many of them had a good look at our Bonny Bell; and the Radley boys, as they sent their long boats spinning down the river towards Sandford, were apparently much struck. Bell, unconscious of the innocent admiration of those poor boys, was attending much more to the talk of our Uhlan than to her

tiller-ropes. As for him—but what man would not have looked contented under these conditions—to be strong, healthy, handsome, and only twenty-five; to have comfortable means and an assured future; to have come out of a long and dangerous campaign with honour and sound limbs; to be off on a careless holiday through the most beautiful country, take it for all in all, in the world; and to be lying lazily in a boat on a summer's evening, on a pretty English river, with a pretty English girl showing her friendly interest and attention in every glance of her blue eyes?

You should have seen how naturally these two fell behind us, and formed a couple by themselves, when we had left the boat and were returning to our inn. But as we walked up to Carfax, Bell separated herself from us for a moment and went into the post-office. She was a considerable time there. When she came out, she was folding up a letter which she had been reading.

"You have got your letter at last," said Tita.

"Yes," said Bell, gravely, but showing no particular gladness or disappointment.

At dinner she was rather reserved; and so, curiously enough, was the Lieutenant. After dinner, when we were allowed half an hour by ourselves for a cigar, he suddenly said—

"Why do you not interfere with that stupid young fellow?"

"Who?" I asked, in blank amazement.

"Why, that young fellow at Twickenham—it is quite monstrous, his impertinence. If I were the guardian of such a girl, I would kick him—I would throw him into the river and cool him there."

"What in all the world do you mean?"

"Why, you must know. The letter that Miss Bell did ask for more than once, it is from him; and now when it comes, it is angry, it is impertinent—she is nearly crying all the time at dinner. *Sackerment!* It is for some one to interfere, and save her from this insult—this persecution——"

"Don't bite your cigar to pieces, but tell me, if you please, how you happen to know what was in the letter."

"She told me," said the Lieutenant, sullenly.

"When?"

"Just before you came down to dinner. It is no business of mine—no; but when I see her vexed and disturbed, I asked her to tell me why; and then she said she had got this letter, which was a very cruel one to send. Oh, there is no mystery—none. I suppose he has a right to marry her—very well; but he is not married yet, and he must not be allowed to do this."

"Bell at least might have told me of it, or have confided in Tita——"

"Oh, she is telling her now, I dare say. And she will tell you too, when there are not all of us present. It is no secret, or she would not have told me. Indeed, I think she was very sorry about that; but she was very much vexed, and I asked her so plain, that she answered me. And that is much better to have confidence between people, instead of keeping all such vexations to yourself. Then I ask her why he is angry? and she says only because she has gone away. Pfui! I have never heard such nonsense!"

"My dear Oswald," I say to him, "don't you interfere between two young people who have fallen out, or you will suffer. Unless, indeed——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless they happen to be angels."

"Do you know this—that he is coming to see her?"

"Well, the phaeton can hold five at a pinch. Why should not we have an addition to our party?"

"Very good. I do not care. But if he is rude to her, he will not be very long in the phaeton."

"Why, you stupid boy, you take these lovers' quarrels *au grand sérieux*. Do you think he has been positively rude to her? Nothing of the kind. He has been too well brought up for that, although he has a peevish temper. He might be with us all through the journey——"

"*Jott bewahre!*" exclaimed the Count, with a kick at a cork that was lying on the carpet.

"—And these two might be at daggers drawn and you would see nothing of it. Indeed, young people never get extremely courteous to each other until they quarrel and stand on their dignity. Now, if you had seen that letter, you would have found it respectful and formal in the highest degree—perhaps a trifle sarcastic here and there, for the lad unhappily thinks he has a gift that way—but you would find no rhetorical indignation or invective."

The Count threw his cigar into the grate.

"They will be waiting for us," he said; "let us go."

We found Tita with the bézique-cards spread out before her. Bell looked up with rather a frightened air, apparently conscious that the Lieutenant was likely to have spoken about what she had confided to him at the impulse of a momentary vexation. However, we sat down.

The game was an open and palpable burlesque. Was Ferdinand very intent on giving checkmate when he played chess with Miranda in the cave; or was he not much more bent upon placing his king in extreme danger and offering his queen so that she had to be taken? The audacious manner in which this young Lieutenant played his cards so as to suit Bell was apparent to everyone, though no one dared speak of it, and Bell only blushed sometimes. When she timidly put forth a ten, he was sure to throw away another ten, although he had any amount of aces in his hand. He spoiled his best combinations rather than take tricks when it was clear she wanted to lead. Nay, as he sat next to her, he undertook the duty of marking her various scores, and the manner in which the small brass hand went circling round the card was singular, until Tita suddenly exclaimed—

"Why, that is only a common marriage!"

"And do you not count forty for a common marriage?" he said, with a fine assumption of innocent wonder.

Such was the ending of our first day's rest; and then, just before candles were lit, a Cabinet Council was held to decide whether on the morrow we should choose as our halting-place Moreton-in-the-Marsh or Bourton-on-the-Hill. The more elevated site won the day.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### NEAR WOODSTOCK TOWN.

"In olde dayes of the king Arthoúr,
Of which that Britons speake great honoúr,
All was this land full filled of faerie;
The Elf-queen, with her jolly company,
Danced full oft in many a green mead.
This was the old opinion, as I read;
I speak of many a hundred years ago;
But now can no man see no elves mo'."

THE phaeton stood in the High Street of Oxford. Castor and Pollux, a trifle impatient after the indolence of the day before, were pawing the hard stones, their silken coats shining in the morning sunlight; Queen Titania had the reins in her hands; the tall waiter who had been a circus-rider was ready to smile us an adieu; and we were all waiting for the Lieutenant, who had gone off in search of a map that Bell had forgotten.

If there is one thing more than another likely to ruffle the superhuman sweetness of my Lady's temper, it is to be kept waiting in a public thoroughfare with a pair of rather restive horses under her charge. I began to fear for that young man. Tita turned once or twice to the entrance of the hotel; and at last she said, with an ominous politeness in her tone—

"It does seem to me singular that Count von Rosen should be expected to look after such things. He is our guest. It is no compliment to give him the duty of attending to our luggage."

"My dear," said Bell, leaning over and speaking in very penitent tones, "it is entirely my fault. I am very sorry."

"I think he is much too good-natured," says Tita, coldly.

At this Bell rather recedes, and says, with almost equal coldness—

"I am sorry to have given him so much trouble. In future I shall try to do without his help."

But when the Count did appear—when he took his seat beside Tita, and we rattled up the High Street and round by the Corn Market, and past Magdalen Church, and so out by St. Giles's Road, the remembrance of this little preliminary skirmish speedily passed away. For once more we seemed to have left towns and streets behind us, and even while there were yet small villas and gardens by the side of the road, the air that blew about on this bright morning seemed to have a new sweetness in it, and the freshness and pleasant odours of innumerable woods and fields. There was quite a bright light, too, in Bell's face. She had come down-stairs with an obvious determination to cast aside the remembrance of that letter. There was something even defiant in the manner in which she said—in strict confidence, be it observed—that if Arthur Ashburton did intend to come and meet us in some town or other, there was no use in being vexed about it in the meantime. We were now getting into the open country, where pursuit would be in vain. If he overtook us, it would be through the mechanism of railways. His only chance of obtaining an interview with Bell was to lie in wait for us in one of the big towns through which we must pass.

"But why," said the person to whom Bell revealed these matters, "why should you be afraid to meet Arthur? You have not quarrelled with him."

"No," said Bell, looking down.

"You have done nothing that he can object to."

"He has no right to object, whatever I may do," she said with a gentle firmness. "But, you know, he is annoyed, and you cannot reason with him; and I am sorry for him—and—and—and what is the name of this little village on the left?"

Bell seemed to shake off this subject from her, as too vexatious on such a fine and cheerful morning.

"That is Woolvercot; and there is the road that leads down to Godstow, and the ruins of Godstow Nunnery, in which Rosamond Clifford lived and died."

"And I suppose she rode along this very highway," said Bell, "with people wondering at her beauty and her jewels, when she used to live at Woodstock. Yet it is a very ordinary-looking road."

Then she touched Tita on the shoulder.

"Are we going to stop at Blenheim?" she asked.

"I suppose so," said our driver.

"I think we ought not," said Bell; "we shall be greatly disappointed, if we do. For who cares about the Duke of Marlborough, or Sir John Vanbrugh's architecture? You know you will be looking about the trees for the old knight with the white beard, and for Alice Lee, and for pretty Phœbe Mayflower, and for Wildrake and the soldiers. Wouldn't it be better to go past the walls, Tita, and fancy that all these old friends of ours are still walking about inside in their picturesque costume? If we go inside, we shall only find an empty park and a big house, and all those people gone away, just like the fairies who used to be in the woods."

"But what are the people you are speaking of?" said the Count. "Is it from history, or from a romance?"

"I am not quite sure," said Bell, "how much is history, and how much is romance; but I am sure we know the people very well; and very strange things happened inside the park that we shall pass by and by. There was a pretty young lady living there, and a very sober and staid colonel was her lover. The brother of this young lady was much attached to the fortunes of the Stewarts, and he brought the young Prince Charles in disguise to the house; and all the gratitude shown by the Prince was that he began to amuse himself by making love to the sister of the man who had risked his life to

save him. And of course the grave colonel discovered it, and he even drew his sword upon Prince Charles——"

"I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle," said the Lieutenant, "but do not trouble to tell me the story; for I know it very well. I did read it in Germany years ago; and I think if Colonel Esmond had thrashed the Prince——"

"Oh no, you are mistaken," said Bell, with some wonder; "it is Colonel Markham, not Colonel Esmond; and the brother of the young lady succeeded in getting the Prince away just before Cromwell had time to seize him."

"Cromwell!" said our Lieutenant, thoughtfully.

"Ah, then, it is another story. But I agree with you, Mademoiselle: if you believe in these people very much, do not go into the park, or you will be disappointed."

"As you please," said Tita, with a smile.—I began to observe that when the two young folks agreed about anything, my Lady became nothing more than an echo to their wishes.

At length we came to the walls that surrounded the great park. Should we leave all its mysteries unexplored? If one were to clamber up, and peep over, might not strange figures be seen, in buff coats and red, with bandoleers and helmets; and an aged knight with a laced cloak, slashed boots, and long sword; countrywomen in white hoods and black gowns; divines with tall Presbyterian hats and solemn visage; a braggart and drunken soldier of the king, and a colonel the servant of Cromwell? Or might not Queen Elizabeth be descried, looking out as a prisoner on the fair domains around her? Or might not Chaucer be found loitering under those great trees that he loved and celebrated in his verse? Or, behind that splendid wall of chestnuts and elms, was it not possible that Fair Rosamond herself might be walking all alone, passing like a gleam of light through the green shadows of the trees, or sitting by the well that still bears her name, or reading in the heart of

that bower that was surrounded by cunning ways? Was it along this road that Eleanor came? Or did Rosamond, surviving all her sin and her splendour, sometimes walk this way with her sister-nuns from Godstow, and think of the time when she was mistress of a royal palace and this spacious park?

We drove into the town of Woodstock. The handful of houses thrown into the circular hollow that is cut in two by the river Glym, was as silent as death. In the broad street that plunged down into the valley, scarcely a soul was to be seen; and even about the old town-hall there were only some children visible. Had the play been played out, and the actors gone for ever? When King Henry was fighting in France or in Ireland, doubtless Rosamond, left all by herself, ventured out from the park, and walked down into the small town, and revealed to the simple folks the wonders of her face, and talked to them. No mortal woman could have remained in a bower month after month without seeing anyone but her attendants. Doubtless, too, the people in this quaint little town were very loyal towards her; and would have espoused her cause against a dozen Eleanors. And so it happened, possibly, that when the romance came to an end, and Rosamond went to hide her shame and her penitence in the nunnery of Godstow, all the light and colour went out of Woodstock, and left it dull, and grey, and silent as it is to this day.

The main street of Woodstock, that dips down to the banks of the Glym, rises as abruptly on the other side; and once past the turnpike, the highway runs along an elevated ridge, which on the one side is bounded by a continuation of Blenheim Park, and, on the other, slopes down to a broad extent of level meadows. When we had got up to this higher ground, and found before us an illimitable stretch of country, with ourselves as the only visible inhabitants, the Lieutenant managed to introduce a remote hint about a song which he had heard Bell humming in the morning.

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"I think it was about Woodstock," he said; "and if you will please to sing it now, as we go along, I shall get out for you the guitar."

"If you will be so kind," said Bell, quite submissively.

What had become of the girl's independence? Asked to sing a song at great trouble to herself—for who cares to play a guitar in the back-seat of a phaeton, and with two pairs of wheels rumbling an accompaniment?—she meekly thanks him for suggesting it! Nay, it was becoming evident that the girl was schooling herself into docility. She had almost dropped entirely the wild phrases and startling metaphors that so deeply shocked Tita. Sometimes they dropped out inadvertently; and sometimes, too, she gave way to those impulsive imaginative flights that led her unthinkingly into an excitement of talk which Tita used to regard with a sort of amused wonder. But of late all these things were gradually disappearing. She was less abrupt, independent, wayward in her manner. She waited more patiently to receive suggestions from others. She was becoming a good listener; and she received meekly criticisms that would, but a short time before, have driven her into a proud and defiant silence, or provoked some rejoinder a good deal more apt than gentle. It was very odd to mark this amiable self-discipline struggling with her ordinary frank impetuosity; although sometimes, it is true, the latter had the best of it.

On this occasion, when the Lieutenant had jumped down and got out the guitar for her, she took it very obediently; and then Tita rested the horses for a little while under the shadow of some overhanging trees. Of course you know the ballad that Bell naturally turned to, seeing where she was at the moment, and the sort of music she was most familiar with.

"Near Woodstock town I chanced to stray,
When birds did sing and fields were gay,
And by a glassy river's side
A weeping damsel I espied."

This was what she sang, telling the story of the forlorn maiden who was found weeping for her faithless lover, who only wished that he might come and visit her grave, and think of her as "one who loved, but could not hate." Perhaps this old-fashioned ballad is not a masterly composition; but the music of it is expressive enough; and we who were familiar with Bell's ballads had got into a habit of not caring much what she sang, as long as she only continued singing.

"You would make your fortune by singing," said Tita, as Bell finished, and the horses were sent forward.

"Perhaps," said the girl, "if all my audience were like you. But I think you must have been lent out as an infant to an old woman with an organ, and so, by merely sitting on the vibrating wood, you have become so sensitive to music that anything at all pleases you."

"No, Mademoiselle," said the Lieutenant, "you do yourself an injustice. I never heard a voice like yours, that has the tremble of a zither in it, and is much softer than a zither."

Bell blushed deeply: but to conceal her embarrassment, she said lightly to Tita—

"And how am I to make my fortune? Oh, I know, —by coming in after public dinners, to sing grace, and follow the toasts with a glee. I am in white silk, with a blue ribbon round my neck, white gloves, bracelets, and a sheet of music. There is an elderly lady in black velvet and white pearls, who smiles in a pleasant manner—she sings, and is much admired by the long rows of gentlemen—they have just dined, you know, and are very nice and amiable. Then there is the tenor —fair and smooth, with diamond rings, a lofty expression, and a cool and critical eye, that shows he is quite accustomed to all this. Then there is the stout, red-bearded man who sings bass, and plays the piano for the four of us, and is very fierce in the way he thumps out his enthusiasm about the Queen, and the Navy, and the Army, and the Volunteers. What a happy

way of living that must be! They will give us a nice dinner beforehand—in a room by ourselves, perhaps; and all we have to do is to return thanks for it in an emotional way, so that all the waiters shall stand round in a reverential manner. But when that is over, then we introduce a few songs—sprightly, coquettish songs, and the gentlemen are vastly amused—and you think——"

"Well, what do you think?" said I, seeing that Bell rather hesitated.

"I think," said Tita, with a smile, "that you are very ungenerous, Bell, in remembering so much of what you saw the other night from the gallery of the Freemasons' Tavern. Is it fair to recall, in open daylight, in the cool forenoon, the imbecile good-nature and exuberant loyalty of a lot of gentlemen who have just dined? I wonder how many of the husbands there told their wives what sums they signed away under the influence of the wine?"

"I dare say," says one of the party, "that the wives would be sorry to see so much money go in charity which might otherwise have been squandered in millinery and extravagances."

"Don't be ill-tempered, my dear," says Queen Tita, graciously. "Women are quite as charitable as men; and they don't need a guinea dinner to make them think of other people. That is a sort of charity that begins at home. Pray how much did *you* put down?"

"Nothing."

"I thought so. Go to a charity dinner, enjoy yourself, and come away without giving a farthing. You would not find women doing that."

"Only because they have not the courage."

"They have plenty of courage in other directions—in getting married, for example, when they know what men are."

"Knowing that, is it not a pity they choose to make martyrs of themselves? Indeed, their anxiety to become martyrs is astonishing. But what if I say that in the next published list of subscriptions you

will find my name down for about as much as your last millinery bill came to?"

"I think that a great deal more likely, for I know the state of philanthropy into which men get at a public dinner—fathers of families, who ought to remember their own responsibilities, and who are impatient enough if any extra bit of comfort or kindness is wanted for their own kith and kin."

"Some such trifling matter as a fur cloak, for instance, that is bought out of a Brighton shop-window for sixty-five guineas, and is only worn twice or thrice, because some other woman has the neighbour of it."

"That is not true. You *know* the weather changed."

"The weather! what weather? Were you at Brighton at the time?"

Titania did not reply for a considerable time. Perhaps she was thinking of some crushing epigram; but at all events Bell endeavoured to draw her away from the subject by pointing out another river, and asking whether this or the Glym at Woodstock was the stream associated with the "Oxfordshire Tragedy" she had just been singing. We discovered, however, that this small stream was also the Glym, which here winds round and through the marshy country that Thomas Wharton described.[1] Bell came to the conclusion that the banks by the river at this part were not sufficiently picturesque for the scene of the song, where the love-lorn heroine sits and weeps by a glassy stream, and complains that her lover is now wooing another maid.

[1] "Within some whispering osier isle,
Where Glym's low banks neglected smile:
And each trim meadow still retains
The wintry torrent's oozy stains;
Beneath a willow, long forsook,
The fisher seeks his custom'd nook;
And bursting through the crackling sedge,
That crowns the current's caverned edge,
He startles from the bordering wood
The bashful wild-duck's early brood."
*Ode to the First of April.*

Meanwhile, my Lady had given expression to the rebellious thoughts passing through her mind, by admonishing Castor and Pollux slightly; and these accordingly were going forward at a rattling pace. We rushed through Enstone. We dashed along the level highway that lies on the high ground between the Charlford Farms and Heythrop Park. We sent the dust flying behind us in clouds as we scudded down to Chipping Norton; and there, with a fine sweep, we cantered up the incline of the open square, clattered over the stones in front of the White Hart Inn, and pulled up with a noise that considerably astonished the quiet village.

This large open space gives to Chipping Norton a light and agreeable appearance; and on entering the big tall inn that looks down over the square, we found everything very cleanly, bright, and comfortable. The very maid-servant who served us with lunch was a model of maid-servants, and was a very handsome young woman besides, with shining light-blue eyes and yellow hair. The Lieutenant at once entered into a polite conversation with her, and she informed him, in answer to his respectful inquiries, that she had just come from Folkestone.

"From Folkestone! that is a seaport—a busy place—a large town, is it not?"

"Yes, there *was* some business doing there," said the maid, with an inflection of voice which rather cast discredit on Chipping Norton.

"Don't you find this place dull?" he asked.

"Well, I can't say the people seem to worry themselves much," she replied with a slight curl of the lip.

"That is very good for the health," said the Count gravely. "Now I do think you have a very nice and even temper, that does not irritate you——"

But here my Lady and her companion came into the room, and the conversation ceased; for the Lieutenant had at once to spring up and take charge of the books, maps, and scarves that Bell had brought in with her. And then, when we sat down to lunch,

he was entirely engrossed in attending to her wants insomuch that he was barely civil to the more elderly lady who had from the first been his champion. As for Bell, what had become of her dislike to officers, her antipathy to the German race, her horror of Uhlans. That very morning I had heard on good authority that Bell had been asking in confidence whether England did not owe a great debt to Germany for the gift of Protestantism which that country had sent us. "And were not the Prussians mostly Protestant?" asked Bell. What answer was returned I do not know; for Queen Titania is strong on the point that the word "Protestant" is not scriptural.

"But I have quite forgotten to tell you," remarked the Lieutenant, "that this morning, when I was walking about in Oxford, I came into the theatre. I saw some bills up; I went along a strange passage; I found an iron gate, and much lime and stone, and things like that. A man came—I asked him if I could see the theatre, and he took me into the place, which they are repairing now. Oh, it is a very dingy place—small, tawdry, with ridiculous scenes, and the decorations of the galleries very amusing and dirty. Why, in an old city, with plenty of rich and intelligent people, you have such a pitiful little theatre?—it is only fit for a country green and wandering actors. In a great university town, you should have the theatre supported by the colleges and the bequests, and hire good actors, and play all the best dramas of your great writers. That would be a good education—that would be a good compliment to pay to your great dramatists. But here, in a city where you have much learning, much money, much of your young men of good families being educated, you have only a dingy, small show, and I suppose it is farces they play, and wretched dramas, for the townspeople and the farmers. That is not much respect shown to your best authors by your learned institutions."

"No wonder students find the milliners' shops more attractive," said Tita with a smile.

"But I think there is always much interest in an empty theatre," continued the Lieutenant. "I did go all over this poor little building, and saw how it imitated the deceptions of fine theatres in a coarse manner. I saw the rude scenes, the bad traps, the curious arrangements, which I do not think can differ much from the theatre which Shakespeare himself described, where a man was made to represent a city, if I am right."

"You are familiar with the arrangements of a theatre, I suppose?" I say to the Lieutenant.

"Pray tell me if you saw anything else in Oxford this morning," says Tita, hastily.

"I suppose you could produce a pantomime yourself," I observe to the young man.

"Did you visit any more of the colleges?" said Tita, at the same moment.

"Or get up a ballet?"

"Or go down to the Isis again?"

Von Rosen was rather bewildered; but at last he stammered out—

"No, Madame, I did not go down to the river this morning. I walked from the theatre to the hotel; for I remained much too long in the theatre. Yes, I know something about the interior of theatres. I have been great friends with the managers and actors, and took great interest in it. I used to be much behind the stage—every night at some times; and that is very curious to a young man who likes to know more than other people, and thinks himself wise not to believe in delusions. I think it is Goethe who has made many of our young men like to know stage-managers, and help to arrange pieces. But I find that they always end by being very much in love with one of the young ladies, and then they get not to like the theatres, for they do not wish everybody to admire her and be allowed to look at her. This is very good for the theatre, however; for they take many boxes, and ask their friends to accompany them, and that pays better than to let out the seats by the year to families. Some of the young men make light of this; others are more melancholy, but afterwards

they have much interest in some theatres merely for the sake of the old associations."

"Oh, Bell," exclaimed Tita, turning anxiously to our companion, "did you see that your guitar was properly put away, or has it been left lying open in the phaeton?"

"I did put it away, Madame," said the Lieutenant.

"Oh, thank you," said Tita. "I am sure if some of those ostlers were to have their curiosity aroused, we should have no more music all the journey."

And thus, having got the Lieutenant away from rambling reminiscences of theatres, the little woman took very good care he should not return to them; and so we finished luncheon without any catastrophe having happened. Bell had been sitting very quietly during these revelations, scarcely lifting her eyes from the table, and maintaining an appearance of studied indifference. Why should she care about the mention of any actress, or any dozen of actresses? My Lady's anxiety was obviously unnecessary.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A MOONLIGHT NIGHT.

"Till the live-long daylight fail;
Then to the spicy nut-brown ale,
With stories told of many a feat,
How faery Mab the junkets eat."

CHIPPING NORTON is supplied with all the comforts of life. Before leaving for the more inhospitable regions in which we are to pass the night, we take a leisurely walk through the curious little town, that is loosely scattered over the side of a steep slope. Here civilization has crowded all its results together; and Queen Tita is asked whether she could not forsake the busy haunts of men, and exchange that hovering between Leatherhead and London, which constitutes her existence, for a plain life in this small country town.

"Chemists' shops abound. There is a subscription

reading-room. There are co-operative stores. A theatre invites you to amusement. You may have *Lloyd's News*, various sorts of sewing machines, and the finest sherry from the wood——"

"Along with a Wesleyan chapel," she says, with a supercilious glance at the respectable, if somewhat dull-looking little building that fronts the main street.

There is no reply possible to this ungracious sneer; for who can reason, as one of us hints to her, with a woman who would spend a fortune in incense, if only she had it, and who would rejoice to run riot in tall candles?

Bell takes us away from Chipping Norton, the Lieutenant sitting beside her to moderate the vehemence of her pace in the event of her getting into a difficulty. First the road dips down by a precipitous street, then it crosses a hollow, in which there are some buildings of a manufactory, a tiny river, and a strip of common or meadow, and then it ascends to the high country beyond by a steep hill. On the summit of this hill we give the horses a rest for a few seconds, and turn to look at the small town that lies underneath us in the valley. There is a faint haze of blue smoke rising from the slates and tiles. The deadened tolling of a bell marks the conclusion of another day's labour: for already the afternoon is wearing on apace; and so we turn westward again, and set out upon the lofty highway that winds onward towards the setting sun. Small hamlets fringe the road at considerable intervals, while elsewhere our route lies between stretches of heath and long fields. And still the highway ascends, until we reach the verge of a great slope; and, behold! there lies before us a great landscape, half in gloom, half in the dusky yellow light of the evening. And over there, partly shutting out the dark lines of hills in the west, a great veil of rain stretches from the sky to the earth, and through it the sun is shining as through ground glass. But so far away is this pale sheet of yellow mist, that we seem to be above it, and over the level and dark landscape on which it descends; and, indeed, where this veil ends,

the sunlight sends forth long shafts of radiance that light up level tracts of the distant and wooded country. What fate is to befall us when we get down into this plain, and go forward in search of the unknown hostelry at which we are to pass the night?

"I hope the rain will not spread," says Bell, who had been telling us of all the wonders we should find at Bourton-on-the-Hill; "but even if it does rain to-night, we shall be as well off on a hill as in a swamp."

"But at Moreton-in-the-Marsh," says Tita, "there is sure to be a comfortable inn, for it is a big place; whereas Bourton-on-the-Hill appears to be only a small village, and we may find there only a public-house."

"But suppose it should clear?" says Bell; "the moon will be larger to-night, and then we can look down on all this level country from the top of the hill. We have not had a night-walk for a long time, and it will be so much more pleasant than being down in the mists of a marsh."

"And you are prepared to sleep on a couple of chairs in the smoking-room of a public-house?" I ask of Miss Bell.

"I dare say we shall get accommodation of some kind," she replies, meekly.

"Oh, I am quite sure Mademoiselle is right; there is so much more adventure in going to this small place on the top of a hill," cried the Lieutenant.

Of course Mademoiselle was right. Mademoiselle was always right now. And when that was understood, Queen Titania never even attempted to offer an objection, so that in all affairs pertaining to our trip the rude force of numbers triumphed over the protests of an oppressed and long-suffering minority.

But only change the relative positions, and then what a difference there was! When the Lieutenant hinted in the remotest way that Bell might do so and so with the horses, she was all attention. For the first time in her career she allowed the interests of justice to moderate her partiality for Pollux. That animal, otherwise the best of horses, was a trifle older than his

companion, and had profited by his years so far as to learn a little cunning. He had got into a trick accordingly of allowing Castor—the latter being younger and a good deal "freer"—to take more than his share of the work. Pollux had acquired the art of looking as if he were perpetually straining at the collar, while all the time he was letting his neighbour exercise to the full that willingness which was his chief merit. Now Bell had never interfered to alter this unequal division of labour. Queen Tita knew well how to make the older horse do his fair share; but Bell encouraged him in his idleness, and permitted his companion to work out of all reason. Now, however, when the Lieutenant pointed out the different action of the horses, and said she should moderate the efforts of the one, while waking up the other to a sense of his duties, she was quite obedient. When the whip was used at all—which was seldom enough, for both horses were sufficiently free—it was Pollux that felt the silk. The Lieutenant fancied he was giving Bell lessons in driving, whereas he was only teaching her submissiveness.

That golden sheet of rain had disappeared in the west, and the yellow light had sunk further and further down behind far bands of dark cloud. A grey dusk was falling over the green landscape, and the birds were growing mute in the woods and the hedges. In the pervading silence we heard only the patter of the horses' feet and the light rolling of the phaeton, as we sped onward down the long slopes and along the plain. We passed Four-shire-Stone, the adjacent shires being Worcester, Warwick, Gloucester, and Oxford; and then, getting on by a piece of common, we rattled into a long and straggling village, with one or two large and open thoroughfares.

Moreton-in-the-Marsh was asleep, and we left it asleep. There were still a few men lounging about the corner public-house, but the women and children had all retired into their cottages from the chill night-air. In some of the windows the light of a candle was visible. The dark elms behind the houses were growing darker.

Between Moreton and Bourton you plunge still deeper into this great and damp valley, and the way lies through a rich vegetation which seems to have thriven well in this low situation. The hedges along the roadside are magnificent; the elms behind them constitute a magnificent avenue extending for nearly a couple of miles; all around are dense woods. As we drove rapidly through this country, it almost seemed as though we could see the white mists around us, although the presence of the vapour was only known to us by the chilling touch of the air. On this July night we grew cold. Tita hoped there would be a fire at the hostelry on the top of the mountain, and she besought Bell to muffle up her throat, so that we should not be deprived of our ballads by the way.

At last we beheld the hill before us.

"It is not very like the Niessen," says Tita.

"But I have no doubt there is a very good inn at the top," remarks the Lieutenant; "for after this hill the people would naturally stop to rest their horses."

"And we shall get up to see the sun rise, as we did on the Niessen?" asks Bell, with a fine innocence; for she knows the opinions of some of us on the subject of early rising. "Do you remember the fat little woman who had walked up all by herself in the morning, and appealed to us all to tell her the names of the mountains, that she might write them down?"

"And how oddly she turned up again at nearly every railway station we stopped at, with all her luggage around her!" says Tita.

"I believe," says Bell, "she is still sailing all through Europe on a shoal of bandboxes and portmanteaus. I wish I could draw the fat little woman balancing herself in that circle of luggage, you know, and floating about comfortably and placidly like a bottle bobbing about in the sea. She may have drifted up to St. Petersburg by this time."

"I think *we* have," says the Lieutenant, who is leading the horses up the steep hill, and who rubs his chilled hands from time to time.

We reach the centre of the straggling line of houses which must be Bourton, and, behold! there is no inn. In the dusk we can descry the tower of a small church, and here the cottages thicken into the position which ought to be dominated by an inn, but there is no sign of any such thing. Have we climbed this precipitous steep, and have Castor and Pollux laboriously dragged our phaeton and luggage up, all for nothing? The Count asks a startled villager, who points to a wayside house standing at the higher extremity of the row. Where is the familiar signboard, or the glowing bar, or the entrance to the stables? Von Rosen surrenders his charge of the horses, and walks into the plain-looking house. It is an inn. We begin to perceive in the dusk that a small board over the doorway bears the name of "SETH DYDE." We find, however, instead of a landlord, a landlady—a willing, anxious, energetic woman, who forthwith sets to work to take our party into this odd little place. For dinner or supper, just as we choose to call it, she will give us ham and eggs, with either tea or beer. She will get two bedrooms for us; and perhaps the single gentleman will accept a shake-down in the parlour. In that room a fire is lit in a trice; a lamp is brought in; and presently the cheerful blaze in the huge fire-place illuminates the curious old-fashioned chamber, with its carpets, and red table-cloth, and gloomy furniture. A large tray appears—an ornamental teapot is produced. Sounds are heard of attendants whipping through the place—so anxious and so dexterous is this good woman. And Queen Tita, who is merciless in one respect, examines the cups, saucers, forks, and knives, and deigns to express her sense of the creditable cleanliness and order of the solitary inn.

Meanwhile, the horses.

"Oh," says the Lieutenant, coming in out of the dark, "I have found a famous fellow—the first man I have seen in England who does his work well with grooming a horse. He is an excellent fellow—I have seen nothing like it. The horses are well off this night, I can assure

you — you will see how good they look to-morrow morning."

"It is strange so good an ostler should be found here," remarks Tita.

"But he is not an ostler," replies the Lieutenant, rubbing his hands at the fire; "he is a groom to some gentleman near. The ostler is away. He does his work as a favour, and he does it so that I think the gentleman must keep some racing horses."

"How do you manage to find out all these things about the people you meet?" asked Titania, with a gracious smile.

"Find out!" replied the tall young man, with his blue eyes staring. "I do not think I find out any more than others. It is people talk to you. And it is better to know a little of a man you give your horses to—and there is some time to talk when you are seeing after the horses—and so—that is perhaps why they tell me."

"But you have not to see about your horses when you are in a bookseller's shop at nine in the morning, and the young lady there tells you about the milliners' shops and the students," says my Lady.

"Oh, she was a very nice girl," remarks the Lieutenant, as if that were sufficient explanation.

"But you talk to everyone, whether they are young ladies, or innkeepers, or grooms: is it to perfect your pronunciation of English?"

"Yes, that is it," said the young man, probably glad to arrive at any solution of the problem.

"Then you ought not to speak to ostlers."

"But there is no ostler who talks so very bad as I do—I know it is very, very bad——"

"I am *sure* you are mistaken," says Bell, quite warmly, but looking down; "I think you speak very good English—and it is a most difficult language to pronounce—and I am sure there are few Germans who can speak it as freely as you can."

"All that is a very good compliment, Mademoiselle," he said, with a laugh that caused Bell to look rather

embarrassed. "I am very glad if I could think that, but it is impossible. And as for freedom of speaking —oh, yes, you can speak freely, comfortably, if you are going about the country, and meeting strangers, and talking to anyone, and not caring whether you mistake or not; but it is different when you are in a room with very polite English ladies who are strangers to you—and you are introduced—and you do not know how to say those little sentences that are proper to the time. That is very difficult—very annoying. But it is very surprising the number of your English ladies who have learned German at school; while the French ladies, they know nothing of that, or of anything that is outside Paris. I do think them the most useless of women—very nice to look at, and very charming in their ways, perhaps—but not sensible, honest, frank like the English women, and not familiar with the seriousness of the world, and not ready to see the troubles of other people. But your Englishwoman who is very frank to be amused, and can enjoy herself when there is a time for that—who is generous in time of trouble, and is not afraid, and can be firm and active and yet very gentle, and who does not think always of herself, but is ready to help other people, and can look after a house, and manage affairs—that is a better kind of woman, I think—more to be trusted—more of a companion—oh, there is no comparison!"

All this time the Lieutenant was busy stirring up the fire, and placing huge lumps of coal on the top; and he had obviously forgotten that he was saying these things to two Englishwomen. Tita seemed rather amused, and kept looking at Bell; Bell said nothing, but pretended to be arranging the things on the table. When the Lieutenant came back from the fire, he had apparently forgotten his complimentary speech; and was regarding with some curiosity the mighty dish of ham and eggs that had come in for our supper.

That was a very comfortable and enjoyable repast. When the chill of driving through the fogs of the plain had worn off, we found that it was not so very cold up

here on the hill. A very liberal and honest appetite seemed to prevail; and there was a tolerable attack made on the ample display of ham and eggs. As for the beer that our Lieutenant drank, it is not fair to tell stories. He said it was good beer, to begin with. Then he thought it was excellent beer. At length he said he had not tasted better since he left London.

Women get accustomed to many things during the course of a rambling journey like this. You should have seen how naturally Queen Tita brought forth the bézique-cards directly after supper, and how unthinkingly Bell fetched some matches from the mantelpiece and placed them on the table. My Lady had wholly forgotten her ancient horror of cigar smoke—in any case, as she pointed out, it was other people's houses we were poisoning with the odour. As for Bell, she openly declared that she enjoyed the scent of cigars; and that in the open air, on a summer evening, it was as pleasant to her as the perfume of the wild roses or the campions.

However, there was no bézique. We fell to talking. It became a question as to which could find the freshest phrases and the strongest adjectives to describe his or her belief that this was the only enjoyable fashion of travelling. The abuse that was poured upon trains, stations, railway porters, and the hurry of cabs in the morning, was excessive. Time-tables of all sorts were spoken of with an animosity which was wonderful to observe when it came along with the soft and pleasant undertones of our Bonny Bell's voice. Tita said she should never go abroad any more. The Lieutenant vowed that England was the most delightful country in the world to drive through. The present writer remarked that the Count had much to see yet; whereupon the foolish young man declared he could seek for no pleasanter days than those he had just spent, and wished, with some unnecessary emphasis, that they might go on for ever. At this moment Bell rose and went to the window.

Then we heard an exclamation. Looking round, we

found the shutters open, and lo! through the window we could see the white glare of moonlight falling into the empty thoroughfare, and striking on the wall on the other side of the way.

"It cannot be very cold outside," Bell remarks.

"Bell!" cries Queen Tita, "you don't mean to go out at this time of night!"

"Why not, Madame?" says the Lieutenant. "Was it not agreed before we came up the hill? And when could you get a more beautiful night? I am sure it will be more beautiful than the sunrise from the top of the Niessen."

"Oh, if you think so," says my Lady, with a gentle courtesy, "by all means let us go out for a little walk."

That is the way affairs began to be ordered about to suit the fancies of those young nincompoops. What little vestige of authority remained with the eldest of the group was exerted to secure a provision of shawls and rugs. Bell was not loth. She had a very pretty grey shawl. She had also a smart little grey hat, which suited it; and as the hat was trimmed with blue, the grey shawl could not have a prettier decoration than the blue ribbon of the guitar. Who proposed it I cannot say; but Bell had her guitar with her when we went out into the bright wonder of the moonlight.

Bourton-on-the-Hill was now a mass of glittering silver, and sharp, black shadows. Below us we could see the dark tower of the church, gleaming grey on the one side; then a mass of houses in deep shadow, with a radiance shining from their tiles and slates; then the grey road down the hill, and on one side of it a big wall, with its flints sparkling. But when we got quite to the summit, and clambered on to a small piece of common where were some felled trees, what words can describe the extraordinary view that lay around us? The village and its small church seemed to be now half-way down the hill; whereas the great plain of the landscape appeared to have risen high up on the eastern horizon, where the almost invisible stars met the dark woods of

Oxfordshire. Over this imposing breadth of wood and valley and meadow—with its dark lines of trees, its glimmerings of farm-houses, and winding streams—the flood of moonlight lay so softly that the world itself seemed to have grown clear from underneath. There were none of the wild glares of white surfaces, and the ebony blackness of shadows which threw everything around us into sharp outline; but a far-reaching and mellow glamour that showed us the mists lying along the river-tracks, and only revealed to us the softened outlines and configurations of the land. If there had been a ruddy light in Moreton-in-the-Marsh, we should have seen it; but the distant village seemed dead; and it, as well as all the great tract of wooded country around it, was whitened over by this softened and silent and almost sepulchral radiance that lay somehow between the dark blue vault overhead and the vast plain beneath. It was but a young moon, but the exceeding rarity of the air lent strength to its radiance.

"Does not moonlight give you the impression that you can hear far?" said Bell in a rather low voice, as if the silence and the stars had overawed her. "It is like frost. You fancy you could hear bells ringing a hundred miles across the clear air."

"Mademoiselle, you will let us hear your singing in this stillness?" said the Lieutenant.

"No, I cannot sing now," she said; and the very gentleness of her voice forbade him to ask again.

We passed along the road. The night air was sweet with the odour of flowers. Out in the west, where the moonlight was less strong, the stars were faintly twinkling. Not a breath of wind stirred; and yet it seemed to us that if a sound had been uttered anywhere in the world, it must have been carried to us on this height. We were as gods up here in the cold sky and the moonlight; and far over the earth, sleep had sealed the lips and the eyes of those poor creatures who had forgotten their sorrows for a time. Should we send them dreams to sweeten their lives by some glimpses of a world different from their own, and cause

them to awaken in the morning with some reminiscence of the trance in their softened memories? Or would it not be better to drown them in the fast and hard sleep of fatigue, so that the dawn might bring them a firmer heart and no vanity of wishes? Gods as we were, we had no care for ourselves. It was enough to be. Could not the night last for ever, and keep us up here near the stars, and give us content and an absolute want of anxiety for the morrow? Queen Titania wandered on as if she were in an enchanted garden, followed by a black shadow on the gleaming white road; and her face, with all its gentleness and delicacy, seemed to have gained something of a pale and wistful tenderness as the white light shone down over the dark woods and crossed our path. As for Bell—but who can describe the grace of the figure that walked before us—the light touching the grey shawl, and the fine masses of brown hair that hung all around the shapely neck and shoulders? We four were in England, sure enough; but it seemed to us then that we were very much alone, and about as near to the starry world as to the definite landscape lying far away on the plain.

We turned, however, when it was found that the road did not lead to any view of the western country. It seemed to run along a high level, cutting through between sand-pits, farms, and woods; and so we made our way back to the bit of common overlooking Bourton, and there we had a few minutes' rest before getting into the small inn, whose windows were gleaming red into the white moonlight.

"Now you must sing to us something, Mademoiselle," said the Lieutenant; "and here is a fine big tree cut down, that we can all sit on; and you shall appear as Apollo in disguise, charming the natives of this landscape with your song."

"But I do not know anything that Apollo sang," said Bell sitting down, nevertheless, and taking the guitar from her companion.

"That is no matter. You must think yourself some one else—why not Zerlina, in this strange place, and

you see Fra Diavolo sitting alone on the rock, and you sing of him, yes? This is a very good place for highwaymen. I have no doubt they have sat here, and watched the gentleman's carriage come up the road beneath; and then, hey! with a rush and a flourish of pistols, and a seizing of the horses, and Madame shrieks in the carriage, and her husband, trembling, but talking very brave, gives up his money, and drives on, with much swearing, but very contented to have no hurt."

"You are very familiar with the ways of highway robbers," said Bell, with a smile.

"Mademoiselle, I am an Uhlan," he replied gravely.

Two at least of the party startled the midnight air with their laughter over this unintentional rebuke; but Bell, conscious of past backslidings, seemed rather discomfited, and hastened to say that she would, if he pleased, sing the song in which Zerlina describes the bandit.

She sang it, too, very charmingly, in that strange silence. Knowing that we could not well see her face, she lent herself to the character, and we could hear the terror of Zerlina thrilling through her experiences of the dreaded Diavolo. "Diavolo! Diavolo!" the dark woods round us seemed to say. "Diavolo! Diavolo!" throbbed the bass strings of the guitar; and the girl's voice trembled in its low tones as she pronounced the name. If any lonely stranger had been passing along the highway at this hour, what would he have thought of this strange thing,—a beautiful girl seated overhead, amid the stars, apparently, with the moonlight striking on her exquisite face and her masses of hair, while she sang in a low and impassioned voice, and struck chords from some strange instrument? Would she not appear as some wild vision of the Lorelei? Or, considering that companions were visible, and some talking and jesting occasionally heard, might not this be a company of strolling play-actors, such as all honest persons were aforetime conjured to discountenance and suppress?[1]

[1] "All persons concerned are hereby desired to take notice of and suppress all mountebanks, rope-dancers, ballad-singers, &c., that have

You know that when Zerlina has sung the first verses of her dramatic song, Diavolo, disguised as a marquis, suddenly rises and sings the concluding verse himself. Bell accordingly handed the guitar to Count von Rosen, with a pretty smile. But would a young man, on such a night, sing a ballad about a mere bandit? No! The Lieutenant was not averse to act the character of Diavolo, so far as his minstrelsy went, but he adopted one of his gentler moods. Lightly running his fingers over the strings, he began to sing of Agnese la Zitella, and how had he learned to soften his voice so? The pretty Agnes was told that she was as sweet as the Spring, and then she is made to call forth her lover because the night is so fair—so much fairer than the day—and so silent. 'Tis a pleasant barcarole, and conveys a message as well as another. But lest he should be thought too bold probably, our Uhlan rose abruptly when he had finished the song, and said lightly, with a laugh—

"There! was not that touching enough for Diavolo? He was a very accomplished person, to have all the rough delights of a brigand, and then go about dressed as a marquis, and amuse himself with adventures. I think they treated him badly in the end, if I do remember right."

Bell did not answer. She had got back the guitar. Apparently she was looking far down over the moonlit plain—her eyes grown distant and thoughtful—and as her fingers wandered over the strings, we heard, almost as in a dream, the various careless notes shape themselves into a melody—a wild, sad melody, that seemed to breathe the tenderness and the melancholy of this still night. "Silent, O Moyle, be the sound of thy waters"—perhaps that was the air; or perhaps it was the heart-breaking "Coolin"—one could scarcely say; but when at last we heard no more of it, Tita rose and

not a licence from the Master of his Majesty's Revels (which for the present year are all printed with black letters, and the king's arms in red) . . . and all those that have licences with red and black letters, are to come to the office to change them for licences as they are now altered. April 17, 1684."

said we must go indoors. There was something quite regretful in her tone. It seemed as if she were bidding good-bye to a scene not soon to be met with again.

The Lieutenant gave his hand to Bell, and assisted her down the steep bank into the road; and we passed on until the window of the inn was found glimmering red through the moonlight. We cast a brief glance around. Bourton lay beneath us, asleep. The great landscape beyond remained dark and silent under the luminous whiteness of the air. The silence seemed too sacred to be broken.

"Good night," said Tita to the Lieutenant; "I hope you have spent at least one pleasant evening with us on this journey."

"I have spent many, Madame," he said, earnestly, "and many very pleasant mornings and days, and I hope we shall have a great many more. I do think we four ought to turn vagrants—gipsies, you call them—and go away altogether, and never go back any more to a large town."

"What do you say, Bell?" asked Tita, with a kindly, if half-mischievous, look.

"I suppose we get to Worcester to-morrow," said Bell, with not much appearance of joy in her face; and then she bade good-night to us all, and left with my Lady.

"There it is," said the Lieutenant, with an impatient flinging down of his cap on the table. "That is what interferes with all our pleasure. You go away on the most delightful excursion in the world—you have the most beautiful scenes, and pleasant companions, and freedom—everything you can wish; and then the young lady who ought to be more happy than anyone—who is at the time of life to have no care but to enjoy her prettiness and her good temper, and all that who is the pleasant ornament of the excursion, and is a great delight to all of us—then she is vexed and frightened because that this—this—this contemptible fellow threatens to meet her in one of those big towns. Sacker-rrrr-ment! I do hope he will come and have it

over—but if he is annoying—if he troubles her any more——"

Thus do we poor mortals fret and vex ourselves in the midst of our happiest circumstances. But at last there comes a time for sleep. And soon this solitary inn on the hill was as quiet and peaceful as the great world outside, where the moonlight seemed to have hushed the very winds to rest, and where the far woods and the streams and the low hills along the edge of the land lay still and dark under the cold majesty of the stars.

[*Note by Queen Titania, written at Worcester on the evening of the following day.*—"Any comment of mine on the foregoing is at the moment unnecessary; we have other matters to engage our attention. *Arthur has come.* I can find no words to express the deep and serious annoyance which this escapade is likely to cause. All our plans may be upset; for he can scarcely explain his present wild proceedings without provoking some sort of final agreement with Bell. And suppose she should consent to be engaged to him, how are we to continue our journey? Of course he will not allow her: if he had not disliked it, he would not be here now. Certainly, I *think* Bell has acted imprudently; for I told her that if she did not answer his letter, he would be sure to imagine all manner of things, and come and see her. The consequence is that she is, I fear, in a great dilemma: for I do not see how she can avoid either refusing him altogether, or consenting to *everything* that he asks. And as we can't continue our journey till Monday, he will have a whole day to persecute her into giving him an answer of some kind; and then she is so foolishly good-hearted that, if he is only pathetic enough, she will say 'yes' to *everything.* It is *most provoking.* If we could only get this one day over, and *him back to London!*"]

## CHAPTER X.

### THE AVENGER.

"Love had ordained that it was Abra's turn
To mix the sweets, and minister the urn."

SURELY nine o'clock was early enough for breakfast at this remote little inn on the top of the hill; and indeed, when we parted the night before, after our moonlight improvisation of *Fra Diavolo*, that was the hour agreed upon. Nine o'clock! Going down at a

quarter past eight, with some notion that the Lieutenant might have sat up half the night consuming his wrath in the smoking of many cigars, and might now be still in bed, I heard voices. Sometimes there was a laugh—and no one who had once heard Bell's musical laugh could ever mistake it. When I went into the parlour which had been the Lieutenant's bedroom, I found that all traces of his occupation were gone: a fire was burning brightly in the grate, the breakfast tray was laid, and Bell sat at the open window, talking to Von Rosen himself, who was standing out on the pavement in the full blaze of the morning sunshine that now filled the main thoroughfare of Bourton-on-the-Hill.

Bell looks round with a startled air.

"My dear," I say to her, "travelling is doing you a world of good. Early rising is an excellent thing for young people."

"I did not know when you might want to start," says Bell, gently, and rather averting her eyes—for which there was no reason whatever.

At this moment Queen Titania came down, looking brisk and cheerful, as she always does in the morning. She glanced at the fire, at the clean table, at Bell sitting by the window, and at the blaze of sunlight on the wall on the other side of the street. Apparently, this pleasant picture put her into an excellent humour, and she said to the Lieutenant, with one of her brightest looks—

"Well, have you been making discoveries this morning? Have you made the acquaintance of many people? Has Bourton-on-the-Hill anything peculiar about it?"

"Oh yes, Madame," said the Lieutenant seriously, "something very singular, which you will not like to hear. This is an English village, in the middle of the country, and yet they never have any milk here—never. They cannot get any. The farmers prefer to make butter, and they will not sell milk on any inducement."

"Why," said Tita, "that is the reason of our having no milk with our tea last evening. But is there no one the landlady can beg a little milk from?"

The Lieutenant looked at Bell, and that young lady

endeavoured to conceal a smile. They had evidently been speculating on Tita's dismay before we came down.

"The great farmer in the neighbourhood," continued the Lieutenant, gravely, "is a Mrs. Phillips. I think she owns all the cattle—all the milk. I did send to her a polite message an hour ago, to ask if she would present us with a little of it—but no; there is no answer. At the moment that Mademoiselle came down, I was going up to Mrs. Phillips's farm, to get the milk for you, but Mademoiselle was too proud for that, and would not allow me to go, and said she would not take it now, since the woman had refused it."

"And how did you propose to overcome Mrs. Phillips's obstinacy?" asked Tita, who seemed possessed by a fear that sooner or later the predatory instincts of this Uhlan would get us into trouble.

"Oh, I do not know, but I should have got it some way," said the Lieutenant; and with that he held out a small book he had in his hand. "See! I have made more discoveries this morning. Here is a note-book I have found, of a young lady at school, who has been staying, perhaps, at this house; and it has given me much amusement—oh, very much amusement, and instruction also. It is just the same as if I had been in the school with her, and she has told me all about her teachers, and the other girls, and all that. Shall I read some to you?"

"Now, *is* it fair," said Bell, "to peep into a young lady's secrets like that?"

"But I have done so already," replied Von Rosen, coolly. "I have read it all—and now I will tell you some of it. First, there are addresses of friends—that is nothing. Then there are stitches of knitting—that is nothing, only the young lady seems correct and methodist—no, methodical, I should say. Then there are notes of lectures, and very much good information in them, oh, very good indeed—I am not surprised your English young ladies know very much. Let me see: '*Epic poetry we like, because they treat of great men and great actions. "Paradise Lost" admired for its noble*

*language. Milton a Puritan. England receives solidity of character from the Puritans. Dryden and Byron are not read, although very great. Byron hated his own race —is not a good poet to read.'* This is very good instruction ; but she hastens now to put down something about two other girls, who were perhaps at the lecture. She says : *'Shocking, impertinent, ill-bred creatures ; my spirit recoils from them.'* Then there is a question addressed to her neighbour : *'Do you see how Miss Williams has got her hair done?'* "

Here Queen Titania protested against these revelations, and would have held out her hand for the book ; but the Lieutenant only stepped back a few inches from the window, and said, seriously—

" There is much better information to come. Here she puts down in order the phrases which one of the masters has used to her class : polite phrases, she says, to use to ladies. 1. *You degrade yourselves.* 2. *How much more kitchen-maidism?* 3. *Simply offensive.* 4. *It shows how you have been brought up.* 5. *I will put a stop to this impertinence.* 6. *Silence, ladies!* 7. *Pretty conduct!* I am afraid he has had an unruly class. Then the young lady has a little piece of composition which I think is the beginning of a novel. She says : *'The summit of Camberwell Grove, which forms part of the lordly elevation known as Denmark Hill, is one of the most charming and secluded retreats around the great metropolis. Here, in the spring-time, groves of lindens put forth their joyous leaves, and birds of various colours flit through the branches, singing hymns of praise. On the one side, the dreary city dwells behind an enchanted veil of trees ; on the other, you pass into emerald fields, which stretch onwards to the Arabian magnificence of the Crystal Palace. In this lofty and picturesque spot, Lord Arthur Beauregard was accustomed to pace, musing on the mystery and gloom which had enveloped him since he left the cradle.'* There is no more of this very good story, but on the next page there is a curious thing ; there are three lines all surrounded by a scroll, and do you know what is written?—*'A Woman can do* ANY

THING *with a man by not contradicting him ;'* and underneath the scroll is written, *'Don't I wish this was true ? Helen M——.'* None of the rest is written so clearly as this——"

"Count von Rosen, I will *not* listen to any more!" cried Tita. "It is most unfair of you to have been reading this young lady's confessions——"

"I get them in a public inn: I have the right, have I not?" remonstrated the Lieutenant. "It is not for pleasure—it is for my instruction that I read. Oh, there are very strange things in this book."

"Pray give it to me," said Bell, quite gently.

He had refused to surrender it to my Lady; but the moment that Bell asked for it, he came forward and handed it in through the window. Then he came in to breakfast.

Little time was spent at breakfast; the sun was shining too brightly outside. We called for our bill, which was brought in. It was entitled "Bill of Fare." Our dinner of the previous evening was called tea, and charged at the rate of one shilling a head. Our breakfasts were one shilling each. Our bedrooms were one shilling each. Any traveller, therefore, who proposes to stay at Bourton-on-the-Hill, cannot do better than put up at the inn of W. Seth Dyde, especially as there is no other; and I heartily wish that he may enjoy something of the pleasant companionship, the moonlight, and the morning freshness that graced our sojourn on the top of this Worcestershire hill.

Then into the phaeton again, and away we go through the white sunlight and the light morning breeze that is blowing about these lofty woods! There is a resinous odour in the air, coming from the furze and the ferns. The road glares in the sunlight. Overhead the still blue is scarcely flecked by a cloud; but all the same there is a prevailing coolness that makes the driving through the morning air delicious. It is a lonely country—this stretch of forest and field on the high level between Bourton and Broadway. We pass Bourton Clump, and leave Bourton Wood on the right. We skirt Upton

Wold, and get on by Furze Heath. Then, all at once, the land in front of us seems to drop down; we come in sight of an immense stretch of blue plain, from which the thin mists of the morning have not wholly risen. We are on the top of the famous Broadway Hill.

By the side of the road there is a strange, old-fashioned little building, which is apparently a wayside chapel. Count von Rosen jumps down to have a look at this odd relic of our former Catholicism, which has remained on the summit of this hill for several centuries. He can discover nothing but a sign which tells that this sacred edifice now contains wines, spirits, and beer; so he comes back, and goes up to the corner of a field opposite, where a middle-aged man, surrounded by some young folks, is making hay. In the utter stillness of the place, we can hear all the questions and answers. The small building is not so very old; it never was a church. The stones there mark the boundary between Gloucester and Worcester. The view from this place is considered unrivalled for extent; you can see the Black Sandy Mountains on a very clear day.

"Indeed!" says the Count. "Where are they, the mountains you speak of?"

"I don' knaw, sir—I've heerd tell on 'em—I never wur theear."

Going down this steep hill Tita looks anxious. A bad stumble, and we should go rolling over the little wall into the ravine beneath. One has a far-off reminiscence of Switzerland in watching the horses hanging back from the pole in this fashion, while every bend of the road seems more precipitous than its predecessor. Then we get down to the plain, rattle through the level and straggling village of Broadway, and drive into the fields again, where the sun is lying warmer than it was up over the top of the hill.

There is a small boy in a smockfrock sitting underneath the hedge, whittling a stick, while a shepherd's dog lies on the grass beside him.

"Evesham?" calls out the Count, as we pass, merely because there has been a little doubt about the road.

"Naw, zir," was the answer, uttered with a fine *sang-froid.*

Of course we pull up directly.

"Isn't this the way to Evesham?" I ask.

"Yaas, zir," said the boy, coolly looking up from his stick, but sitting still.

"This is the way to Evesham?"

"Yaas, zir."

"Do you know where it is?"

"Naw, zir."

"He is a very cautious boy," says the Lieutenant, as we drive on; "a very cautious boy indeed."

"If he had been asked properly at first," says Bell, with great gravity, "he would have given a proper answer. But when you say, 'Evesham?' of course the boy tells you this is not Evesham."

Evesham, when we did get to it, was found to be a very bright, clean, and lively little town, with the river Avon, slowly gliding through flat meadows, forming a sort of loop around it. In the quaint streets a good amount of business seemed to be going on; and as we put up at the Crown, and went off for a brief ramble through the place, we found quite an air of fashion in the costume of the young ladies and the young gentlemen whom we met. But the latter, although they had copied very accurately the Prince of Wales's dress of the previous year, and had very stiff collars and prominent canes, had an odd look of robust health in their cheeks, which showed they were not familiar with Piccadilly and the Park; while the former, although they were very pretty and very neatly attired, ought not to have turned and pretended to look into the shop-windows in order to have a look at Bell's pretty grey dress and hat, and at Queen Titania's more severe but no less graceful costume. But Evesham does not often entertain two angels unawares; and some little curiosity on the part of its inhabitants may be forgiven.

The people of Evesham are not much given to boating on the Avon; and so—postponing our usual river excursion until we should reach the Severn—Bell besought

us to go into a photographer's establishment, and make experiments with our appearance. The artist in question lived in a wooden house on wheels; and there were specimens of his handiwork nailed up outside. Our entrance apparently surprised the photographer, who seemed a little nervous, and perhaps was a trifle afraid that we should smile at his efforts in art. But surely nothing could be more kindly than Bell's suggestions to him and her conversation with him; for she, as a "professional" herself, conducted the negotiations and arranged the groups. The artist, charmed to see that she knew all about his occult processes, and that she was withal a very courteous and kindly visitor, became almost too confidential with her, and began to talk to her of us three as if we were but blocks of wood and of stone to be played with as these two *savants* chose. Of the result of the various combinations into which we were thus forced, little need be said. Queen Titania came out very well; her pale, dark, clear-cut face telling in every picture, and even making us forget the tawdry bit of brass and the purple velvet of the frame. As for the rest of us, a journey is not a good time to have one's portrait taken. The flush of healthy colour produced by the wind, and by much burning of the sun, may look very well on the natural face, but is apt to produce a different effect on glass.

The Lieutenant, for example, roared with laughter when he saw himself transfigured into a ferocious bandit, with a great black beard, a dark face, and two white holes where his eyes should have been. But the moment he had laughed out, he caught sight of Bell's face. The young lady looked very much vexed, and her eyes were cast down. Instantly the young man said, loud enough for the photographer to hear—

"I do seem to myself very ridiculous in this English costume. When you are used to uniforms for a very long time, and all at once get into this common dress, you think yourself some other person, and you cannot help laughing at the appearance yourself makes."

Bell's eyes said "Thank you" as plainly as eyes

could speak; and then she paid a very grave and gentle compliment to the artist, whom we left beaming over with pride and gratitude towards the young lady.

"To go flirting with a travelling photographer!" says Queen Tita, as we go in to luncheon: "for shame, Bell!"

"No, it was only Mademoiselle's good nature to the poor man," replies the Lieutenant, with an unnecessary tone of earnest protest. "I do think he is the very happiest person in Evesham to-day—that he has not been so happy for many a day."

"I think the portraits are very good," says Bell, bravely, "if you consider how he has to work."

"Now you know you can't excuse yourself, Bell," says my Lady. "You paid him compliments that would have turned any man's head; and as for the truth of them—or rather the unblushing perversion of truth in them——"

But at this moment Tita happened to be passing Bell's chair, and she put her hand very gently on the young lady's head, and patted her cheek—a little caressing action which said more than a thousand protestations of affection.

Our setting out for Worcester was rather a dismal business. Were we school-children who had been playing truant, that we should regard with apprehension a return to town? Or were Bell's vague fears contagious? In vain the Lieutenant sought to cheer her. She knew, and we all of us knew, that if Arthur Ashburton chose to come and ask to see her, nothing could be easier than for him to discover our whereabouts. He was aware of our route, and had been told the names of the principal towns at which we should stop. A party of four arriving from London in a phaeton is not a customary occurrence, and a brief inquiry at the chief hotels in any town would be likely to give him all the information he required.

Then, as we afterwards discovered, Bell had returned no answer to the letter he had sent to Oxford. She had been too much hurt, and had forborne to reply in

kind. Who does not know the distracting doubts and fears that an unanswered letter—when one is at a certain age in life—may conjure up, and the terrible suspense that may prompt to the wildest action? We seemed to share in Bell's dismay. The Lieutenant, however, was light-hearted enough, and, as he relinquished his attempts to break the silence, he sent the horses on at a good pace, and hummed to himself broken snatches of a ballad, and talked caressingly to Castor and Pollux.

When we were a few miles from Evesham, without having seen anywhere a glimpse of the obelisk that stands on the famous Evesham plain, it occurred to us that we might as well ask if we were on the proper road. There seemed a curious quietness and picturesqueness about the wooded lanes through which we were driving in the calm of the twilight. At length we reached a turnpike at the corner of several unfrequented paths, and here an old lady was contentedly sewing, while her assistant, a pretty little girl of thirteen, collected the sixpences. Well, we had only come about five miles out of our route. Instead of going by Pershore, we had struck away northward, and were now in a labyrinth of country lanes, by any of which we might make our way along through the still landscape to Worcester. Indeed, we had no cause to regret this error. The out-of-the-way road that runs by Flyford Flavell and Broughton Hackett proved to be one of the pleasantest we had traversed. In the clear twilight we found ourselves driving through a silent and picturesque district, the only life visible in which was the abundant game. The partridges that were dusting themselves in the road before us, did not get up and disappear with a strong, level, low flight towards some distant field, but walked sedately into the grass by the roadside, and then passed through the hedge. We saw several pheasants calmly standing at the outskirts of the woods. The plump little rabbits ran about like mice around the fences. The sound of the phaeton wheels

was the only noise heard in this peaceful solitude; and as we drove on, the dusk grew apace, and the movements of bird and beast were no longer visible.

Then a new twilight arose—a faint, clear light shining up from below the horizon, and we knew that the moon would speedily be glimmering through the black branches of the woods. The hamlets we passed showed streaks of red within their windows. There were glowworms in the road—points of blue fire in the vague darkness. Then we drove into the gloom of the avenues of Spetchley Park; and finally, with still another glare appearing in the sky—this time a ruddy hue like the reflection of a great fire—we got nearer and nearer to the busy town, and at last heard the horses' feet clattering on a stone street.

The thoroughfares of Worcester were busy on this Saturday night; but at length we managed to make our way through the people and vehicles up to the Star Hotel. We drove into the spacious archway, and passed into the hall, while the people were bringing in our luggage. The Lieutenant was, as usual, busy in giving orders about everything, when the head waiter came up and begged to know my name. Then he presented a card.

"The gentleman is staying at the 'Crown.' Shall I send him a message, sir?"

"No," says Tita, interposing; "I will write a note, and ask him to come round to dinner—or supper, whichever it ought to be called."

"Oh, has Arthur come?" says Bell, quite calmly.

"So it appears, my dear," says Queen Titania; and as she utters the words, she finds that Von Rosen has come up and has heard.

"All right," he says cheerfully. "It will be a pleasure to have a visitor at dinner, Madame, will it not? It is a pity we cannot take him further with us when we start on Monday; but I suppose he has come on business to Worcester?"

The Lieutenant took the matter very coolly. He

handed Bell and Tita upstairs to look after the disposal of their effects; and then came into the dining-room to see what arrangements had been made about dinner.

"If he behaves himself, that is very well and good. You must treat him civilly. But if not—if he is foolish and disagreeable, why——"

The Lieutenant did not say what would happen then. He bethought himself of the horses, and strode away down into the darkness of the yard, humming lightly "Mädele, ruck, ruck, ruck, an meine grüne Seite!" He was evidently in no warlike mood.

## CHAPTER XI.

### SOME WORCESTER SAUCE.

"Faire Emmeline scant had ridden a mile,
A mile forth of the towne,
When she was aware of her father's men
Come galloping over the downe:

"And foremost came the carlish knight,
Sir John of the north countraye;
'Nowe stop, nowe stop, thou false traitoure,
Nor carrye that ladye awaye!'"

"My dear," I say to Queen Titania, as she is fastening a rose in her hair before going down to dinner, "pray remember that Arthur Ashburton is 'also a vertebrate animal.' He has done nothing monstrous or inhuman in paying you a visit."

"Paying me a visit?" says Tita, impatiently. "If he had come to see me, I should not care. But you know that he has come to pick a quarrel with Bell; and that she is likely to grant him everything he asks; and, if she does not, there will be infinite trouble and vexation. I consider it most provoking—and most thoughtless and inconsiderate on his part—to thrust himself upon us in this way."

"And yet, after all," I say, as she fastens on a bracelet which was given her nearly twenty years ago

now, "is there anything more natural? A young man is in love with a young woman——"

"It is his own fault," she interposes.

"Perhaps. So much the worse. He ought all the more to have your compassion, instead of your indignant scorn. Well, she leaves his charming society to go off on a wild rampage through the country. A possible rival accompanies her. The young man is torn asunder with doubts and fears. He writes to her. She does not answer. His anxiety becomes a madness; and forthwith he sets off in pursuit of her. Is there anything in all this to brand him as an outcast from humanity?"

"Why, look at the folly of it! If the girl had proper spirit, would it not drive her into refusing him altogether?"

"Foolish, my dear, yes! but not criminal. Now the whole of you seem to look on Arthur as a monster of wickedness, because he is anxious to marry the girl he is fond of."

My Lady alters the disposition of the thin tracery of silver cord which runs through the dark masses of her hair, and as she thus manages to shelve the subject, she says—

"I suppose we shall have a pleasant time at dinner. Arthur will be fiercely amusing. Plenty of sarcasm going about. Deadly looks of hatred. Jokes as heavy as that one Bell talks of—that was carried to the window by four men, and killed a policeman when it tumbled over."

My Lady is gently reminded that this story was told of a German, before the date of Bell's conversion; whereupon she answers coolly—

"Oh, I do not suppose that Count von Rosen is like all Germans. I think he is quite an exception—a very creditable exception. I know I have never met anyone the least like him before."

"But heroes were not common in your county, were they?"

"They were in yours," says Tita, putting her arm

within mine, and speaking with the most gracious sweetness; "and that was why they took no notice of you."

We go downstairs. At the head of the large dining-room, in front of the fireplace, a young man is standing. He has a time-table in his hand, which he is pretending to read, and his hat is on his head. He hastily removes that most important part of an Englishman's attire, when my Lady enters the room, and then he comes forward with a certain apprehension and embarrassed look on his face. If he had been growing nervous about his reception, there was nothing, at all events, to be feared from Queen Titania, who would have welcomed the * * * himself with an effusive courtesy, if only she had regarded it as her duty.

"Oh, Arthur," she says, her whole face lighting up with a gladness which amazed even me, who am accustomed to watch her ways, "I am really delighted to see you. How good of you to come and spend the evening with us on so short a notice. I hope we have not taken you away from any other engagement?"

"No," says the young man, apparently very much touched by this kindness, "and—and—it is I who ought to apologize for breaking in on you like this."

"Then you will spend to-morrow with us also?" says my Lady, quite pleasantly. Indeed, there is nothing like facing the inevitable with a good grace.

"Yes," says Arthur, rather humbly, "if you think I'm not intruding."

"Why, your coming will be quite a relief. I should never have forgiven you if you had been in our neighbourhood without coming to see us."

You might think that this little speech was of the nature of a fib. But it was not, just at that moment. When people are absent, Tita is about as cool, and accurate, and severe in her judgment of them as any woman can be; and she is not disinclined to state her opinion. But once they come near her—and especially if she has to play the part of hostess, and entertain them—the natural and excessive kindness of the woman

drives her into the most curious freaks of unconscious hypocrisy. Half an hour before she had been talking of Arthur in a way that would have considerably astonished that young man, if he had known; and had been looking forward with dismay and vexation to all the embarrassments of his visit. Now, however, that he was there—thrown on her mercy as it were—she showed him a quite inordinate kindness, and that in the most honest way in the world. A couple of minutes sufficed to convince Arthur that he had at least one firm friend in our household.

He began to look anxiously towards the door. Presently, a voice that he knew pretty well was heard outside; and then—ominous conjunction!—the Lieutenant and Bell entered together. Von Rosen had held the door open for his companion, so that Bell advanced first towards our visitor. Her face was quite calm and a trifle reserved; and yet every one could see that as she shook hands with the young man, there was a timid, half-concealed look of pleasure and welcome in her eyes. He, on his part, was gloomily ceremonious. He scarcely took any notice of the greeting which the Lieutenant carelessly addressed to him. He accompanied us over to the table, and took a seat on the right hand of Tita, with a silence that portended evil. We were likely to have a pleasant evening.

Had he possessed a little more worldly prudence or *savoir faire*, he would now have made some light excuse for his being present. He ought, for form's sake, to have given us to understand that, as he was obliged to be in Oxford, he had come on by rail to pay us a visit. But as it was, no explanation was forthcoming. Our Apemantus had apparently dropped from the skies. He looked very uncomfortable; and replied in monosyllables to the various and continuous remarks that Tita addressed to him. He had never spoken to Bell, who sat next him, and who was herself silent. Indeed, the constraint and embarrassment from which she was suffering began to vex the Lieutenant, who strove in vain to conquer it by every means in his power.

The barometer steadily fell. The atmosphere grew more and more gloomy, until a storm of some sort was inevitable. The anxious efforts of Queen Tita to introduce some cheerfulness were touching to see; and, as for Bell, she joined in the talk about our journey, and what we had seen, in a series of disconnected observations that were uttered in a low and timid tone, as if she were afraid to draw down lightning from the thunder-clouds. Lieutenant von Rosen had at first addressed a word or two to our guest; but finding the labour not productive, he had dropped him entirely out of the conversation. Meanwhile Arthur had drunk a glass or two of sherry. He was evidently nettled at finding the Lieutenant almost monopolizing attention; for Tita herself had given up in despair, and was content to listen. Von Rosen was speaking as usual of the differences between English and German ways, and social aims, and what not, until at last he drifted into some mention of the Republican phenomena that had recently been manifested in this country.

Now what conceivable connection is there between the irritation of an anxious lover and Republicanism? Master Arthur had never alarmed any of us by professing wild opinions on that subject or on any other. We never knew that the young man had any political views, beyond a sort of nebulous faith in the Crown and the Constitution. Consider, therefore, our amazement when, at this moment, he boldly and somewhat scornfully announced himself a Democrat, and informed us that the time was come for dismissing old superstitions and destroying the last monopolies of feudalism. There would be a heavy account to settle with the aristocracy that had for generations made laws to secure its own interests, and tied up the land of the country so that an idle population had to drift into the big towns and become paupers. All this was over. New times were at hand. England was ripe for a new revolution; and woe to them that tried to stem the tide!

The explanation of which outburst was merely this—that Arthur was so angry and impatient with the state

of things immediately around him, that he was possessed with a wild desire to upset and destroy something. And there is nothing so easy to upset and destroy, in rhetoric, as the present political basis of this country.

Well, we looked at the lad. His face was still aglow; and there was something of triumph as well as of fierceness in it. The hero of the old Silesian song, when his sweetheart has forgotten the vows she made, and the ring she gave him is broken in two, would like to rush away into battle, and sleep by camp-fires, under the still night. But nothing half so ordinary would do for our fire-eater, who, because he could not very well kill a Prussian lieutenant, must needs attack the British Crown. Was there any one of us four inclined to resent this burst of sham heroics? Was there not in it something of the desperation of wretchedness that was far more entitled to awaken compassion? Had Arthur been less in love, he would have been more prudent. Had he controlled his emotions in that admirable fashion with which most of our young gentlemen now-a-days seem to set about the business of choosing a wife, he would not have made himself absurd. There was something almost pitiable in this wild, incoherent, ridiculous effort of a young man to do or say something striking and picturesque before the eyes of a girl whose affections he feared were drifting away from him.

The Lieutenant, to whom this outbreak was particularly addressed, took the affair very good-naturedly. He said, with a smile—

"Do you know who will be the most disappointed, if you should have a Republic in England? Why, the Republicans that are very anxious for it just now. Perhaps some of them are very respectable men—yes, I believe that; but if I am not wrong, the men who make the great fuss about it in your nation are not like that. Agitators—is not that what you call them? And, if you have England a Republic, do you think the government of the country will be given to those noisy persons of the present? No—that is not possible,

I think. When the Republic comes, if it does come at all—and I do not know how much force is in this demonstration—all your great men, your well-educated men, your men of good position and good breeding and good feeling—they will all come forward, as they do now, to see that the country is properly governed. And what will become of the present Republicans, who are angry because they cannot get into Parliament, and who wish for a change that they may become great persons? When you take away the Crown, they will not all be kings, I think: there is too much of good sense in this country, and of public spirit, that makes your best men give up their own comfort to look after the government—and so it will be then."

"I hope there will be no violent change in our time, at least," said Queen Tita.

"Madame is anxious about the Church, I know," remarked the Lieutenant, with great gravity; but he looked at Bell, and Bell could not altogether conceal a smile. Arthur, watching them both, noticed that little bit of private understanding; and the gloom on his face visibly deepened.

This must be said, however, that when an embarrassing evening is unavoidable, a dinner is the best method of tiding it over. The various small incidents of the feast supply any ominous gaps in the conversation; and there is, besides, a thawing influence in good meat and drink which the fiercest of tempers finds it hard to withstand. After the ebullition about Republicanism, Arthur had quieted somewhat. By the time we had got down to the sweets, and perhaps with the aid of a little champagne—the lad never drank much at any time, I ought to say—his anger had become modified into a morose and sentimental melancholy; and when he did manage to speak to Bell, he addressed her in a wistful and pathetic manner, as if she were some one on board a vessel and he saw her gradually going away from him, her friends, and her native land. One little revelation, nevertheless, comforted him greatly; and lovers apt to magnify

their misfortunes will note that he might have enjoyed this solace long before if only he had exercised the most ordinary frankness.

"You got a letter I sent you to Oxford, I suppose?" he said, with a studied carelessness.

"Yes," said Bell, with a little conscious colour in her face, as she bent down her eyes.

"I am glad I had the chance of seeing you to-night," he continued, with the same effort at self-possession, "because I—I fancied you might be unwell—or some accident happened—since you did not send the telegram I begged of you."

Here an awful moment of silence intervened. Everybody trembled for Bell's reply, which might provoke the catastrophe we had been seeking to postpone.

"It was only yesterday forenoon I got your letter," Bell says, apparently feeling the silence uncomfortable; "and—and I meant to have answered it to-night——"

"Oh, you were going to answer it?" he says, with his face suddenly getting bright.

"Yes," she says, looking up with some surprise. "You did not suppose I wouldn't answer it?"

In fact, that was just what he had supposed, considering that she had been grievously offended by the tone of his letter.

"I meant to have let you know how we all were, and how far we had got," says Bell, conveying an intimation that this sort of letter might be sent by anybody to anybody.

Nevertheless, Arthur greatly recovered himself after this assurance. She had not broken off with him, after all. He explained that the letter must have been delayed on the way, or she would have got it the day before. He drank another glass of champagne, and said, with a laugh, that he had meditated surprising us, but that the design had failed, for everyone seemed to have expected him.

"I only came down this afternoon; and I suppose I must go back on Monday," he remarked, ruefully.

This looked so very like a request for an invitation

that I was bound to offer him a seat in the phaeton, if he did not mind a little discomfort. You should have seen the look of amazement and indignation which my Lady darted across the table at this moment. Fortunately, Arthur did not notice it. He said he was very much obliged—he feared he would have to return—if he went with us for a day or two, he would inconvenience us sadly—but he would consider it before Monday morning.

After dinner, Von Rosen got up and proposed that he and I should go down to the billiard-room—which is in the end of the building abutting on the stable-yard—and smoke a cigar. Surely generosity could go no further. Arthur looked surprised; and wore quite a pleasant smile on his face when we rose and left.

But perhaps it was merely selfishness that caused our Uhlan to leave the field; for as we two went down the passage, and made our way up to the spacious room, he said—

"I am rather sorry for Mademoiselle. She does not seem to be very glad to meet her old friend—perhaps because he is not in a good temper. That is why I did say we should go and play billiards—there will be a chance of an explanation—and to-morrow he will be all right. It is foolish of him to be disagreeable. All this time of dinner, I was thinking to myself how well he might make himself agreeable if he only wished—with knowing all the polite phrases with ease, and being able to talk without thinking. For me, that is different, you know. I am bound in by stupid limits; and when I think to say something nice to anyone—then I stop because I know nothing of the words—just like at a wall."

He sent the red ball up and down the table in rather a peevish manner; he felt that Arthur had an advantage, perhaps.

"But you talk English remarkably well."

"But I have remarked that you English always say that to a foreigner, and will not tell him when he is wrong. I know I am often wrong—and always about

your past tenses—your '*was loving*' and '*did love*,' and '*loved*' and like that; and I believe I am very wrong with always saying '*do*' and '*did*,' for I studied to give myself free speaking English many years ago, and the book I studied with was 'Pepys' Diary,' because it is all written in the first person, and by a man of good station. Now I find you do not say '*I did think*,' but '*I thought*,' only it is very hard to remember. And as for pronunciation, I know I am very wrong."

Well, he had certainly marked forms of pronunciation, which I have considered it unnecessary to reproduce in recording his talk. He said '*I hef*' for '*I have*,' and '*a goot shawt*' for '*a good shot*.' He also made occasional blunders in accent, through adopting the accent of the Latin word from which the English word is derived. But what were such trifles to the main fact that he could make himself understood?

"But this is very strange," he said; "how much more clearly Mademoiselle speaks than any English lady, or any English person I have known yet. It is very remarkable to me, how I have great difficulty to follow people who talk like as if they had several tongues rolling in their mouth—and others speak very fast—and others let the ends of the words slide away—but Miss Bell, she is always clear, distinct, and very pleasant to hear, and then she never speaks very loud, as most of your people do to a foreigner."

"Perhaps," I say, "there is a reason for Bell's clearness of speech."

"Why?"

"Perhaps she takes pains to be very distinct in talking to you, while she manages not to show it. Perhaps other people can notice that she speaks with a little more deliberation to you than to anyone else."

Von Rosen was obviously much struck.

"Is that possible?" he said, with his eyes full of wonder. "I have not noticed that she did talk slow to me."

"No—she conceals it admirably; but all the same

such is the fact. It is not so much slowness as a sort of careful precision of pronunciation that she affects—and you ought to be very grateful for such consideration."

"Oh, I think it is very good of her—very good indeed—and I would thank her for it——"

"Don't do that, or you will have no more of it. And at present my Lady is catching up a trick of talking in the same way."

"It is very kind," said the Lieutenant, turning to the table with rather a thoughtful manner. "You would not have expected a young girl like that to be so reflective of other people."

Then he broke the balls; and by fair strength of arm screwed the white into the corner pocket. Nobody was more astonished than himself, except the marker. It was, indeed, the first losing hazard he had ever made; he never having played before on a table with pockets. His next stroke was not so successful; and so he consoled himself with lighting a Partaga about eight inches in length.

"At all events," he continued, "your language has not the difference of '*Sie*' and '*du*,' which is a great advantage. Oh, it is a very perplexing thing sometimes. Suppose you do know a young lady very well, and you have agreed with her in private you shall always call each other '*du*;' and then before other people you call her '*Sie*'—it is very hard not to call her '*du*,' by mistake, and then everyone jumps up, and stares at you, and all the secret is known. That is a very terrible thing."

"And please what is the interesting ceremony with which you drink *brüderschaft* with a young lady? The same as usual?—a large jug of beer—your arms intertwined——"

"No—no—no!" he cried. "It is all a mystery. You shall not know anything of that. But it is very good—it is a very pleasant thing—to have *brüderschaft* with a young lady—although you drink no beer, and have no ceremonies about it."

"And what did Fräulein Fallersleben's mamma say when you called her daughter '*du*' by mistake?"

The large empty room resounded with the Lieutenant's laughter.

"That is a good guess—oh! a very good guess—but not just good enough. For it was she who did call me '*du;*' and all the people were surprised—and then some did laugh—but she herself—oh! she was very angry with herself, and with me too, and for some time she called me '*Sie*' even when we were together, until it was likely to be a quarrel. But one more quarrel," added the Lieutenant, with indifference, "was not much matter. It was usually one every day—and then writing of sorrowful letters at the night—and next morning some reconciliation——*Sackerment!* what is the use of talking of all that nonsense?"

And then once more the ball flew about the table; finally lodging in a pocket, and scoring three for a miss. Indeed, our Uhlan was not at home with our big English tables, their small balls, pointed cues, and perpetual pockets. Even when he got a good chance of a cannon, the smallness of the balls caused him to fail entirely. But he had a very excellent cigar. It was something to be away from the embarrassment that had prevailed at dinner. Perhaps, too, he enjoyed a certain sense of austere self-satisfaction in having left to Arthur full possession of the field. On the whole he enjoyed himself very well; and then, our cigars being finished, we had a final look at the horses, and then returned to the coffee-room.

"I am afraid," said Von Rosen, with some alarm, "we have been negligent of our duties."

Master Arthur had left some half-hour before. The ladies had retired. Only one or two of the heaviest topers were left in the bar-parlour; the waiters looked as if they considered their week's work fairly over.

"Tell me," said my Prussian friend, as he got his candle, "is that young gentleman coming round here to-morrow?"

"Probably he is."

"Do you not think, then, it would be good to hire a vehicle and go away somewhere for a drive all the day before he comes?"

"To-morrow is Sunday."

"Well?"

"Do you fancy you would get either Bell or my Lady to go driving on Sunday? Don't you propose such a thing, if you are wise. There is a Cathedral in this town; and the best thing you can do is to study its history and associations early in the morning. You will have plenty of time to think over them to-morrow, inside the building itself."

"Oh, I do not object to that," he remarked, coolly, as he went upstairs, "and I do not care to have too much driving—it is only to prevent Mademoiselle being annoyed, as I think she was at dinner this evening—that is all. I suppose we may go for a walk to-morrow after the church-time? And he will come? Very well, he will not harm me, I am sure; but—but it is a pity—that is all."

And with this somewhat mysterious conclusion, the Lieutenant disappeared towards his own room.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE RIVALS.

"When on the gentle Severn's sedgy bank,
In single opposition, hand to hand,
He did confound the best part of an hour
In changing hardiment with great Glendower."

"If we could only get over this one day,"—that was the burden of Tita's complaining the next morning. Arthur had been invited to breakfast, and had declined; but he was coming round to go with us to the Cathedral. Thereafter, everything to Tita's mind was chaos. She dared hardly think of what the day might bring forth. In vain I pointed out to her that this day was but as another day; and that if any deeds of wrath or

vengeance were hidden away in the vague intentions of our young friend from Twickenham, there was no particular safety gained in tiding over a single Sunday.

"At all events," says my Lady, firmly, "you cannot do anything so imprudent as press him to accompany us further on our journey."

"Cannot the phaeton hold five?"

"You know it cannot, comfortably. But that is not the question. For my own part, I don't choose to have a holiday spoilt by provoking a series of painful scenes, which I know will occur. We may manage to humour him to-day, and get him to leave us in an amiable mood; but it would be impossible to do it two days running. And I am not sure even about this one day."

"But what prevents his dropping down on us at any time—say at Shrewsbury—or Chester—or Carlisle—just as he has done here at Worcester?"

"I will."

That was enough. Having some regard for the young man, I hoped he would submit quietly. But lovers are headstrong; and jealousy, when it is thoroughly aroused, leaves no place in the mind for fear.

It was a bright morning. We could see, through the wire screens of the windows, the Worcester folks walking along the pavements with the sunlight shining on their Sunday finery.

The Lieutenant, as we hurriedly despatched breakfast—for we were rather late—gave us his usual report.

"A very fine town," he said, addressing himself chiefly to Tita, who was always much interested in his morning rambles, "with old religious buildings, and houses with ivy, and high walls to keep back the river. There is a large race-course, too, by the river; and on the other side a fine suburb, built on a high bank, among trees. There are many pleasant walks by the Severn, when you get further down; but I will show you all the place when we go out of the Cathedral. This is a great day at the Cathedral, they say—a Chief Sheriff of the county, I think they call him, is living at

this hotel, and he is going; and you see those people? —they are loitering about to see him drive away."

Even as he spoke, two resplendent creatures, in grey and gold, resembling beef-eaters toned down in colour and gilded, advanced to the archway of the hotel, with long trumpets in their hands. These they suddenly lifted, and then down the quiet street sounded a loud *fanfare*, which was very much like those announcements that tell us, in an historical play, that the King approaches. Then a vehicle drove away from the door; the High Sheriff had gone to the Cathedral; while our breakfast was not even yet finished.

"He does not have the trumpets sounded every time he leaves the hotel?" said the Lieutenant, returning from the window. "Then why when he goes to church? Is it exceptional for a High Sheriff to go to church, that he calls attention to it with trumpets?"

At this moment, Arthur entered the room. He glanced at us all rather nervously. There was less complaisance, too, in his manner, than when we last saw him; the soothing influences of dinner had departed. He saluted us all in a somewhat cool way, and then addressed himself exclusively to my Lady. For Bell he had scarcely a word.

It is hard to say how Queen Tita managed, as we left the hotel, to attach Bell and herself to Master Arthur; but such was the result of her dexterous manœuvres; and in this fashion we hurriedly walked along to the Cathedral. There was a great commotion visible around the splendid building. A considerable crowd had collected to see the High Sheriff; and policemen were keeping a lane for those who wished to enter. Seeing that we were late, and that the High Sheriff was sure to draw many after him, we scarcely expected to get inside; but that, at least, was vouchsafed us, and presently we found ourselves slipping quietly over the stone flooring. All the seats in the body of the building being occupied, we took up a position by one of the great pillars, and there were confronted by a scene sufficiently impressive to those

of us who had been accustomed to the ministrations of a small parish church.

Far away before us rose the tall and graceful lines of the architecture, until, in the distance, they were lost in a haze of sunlight streaming in from the south—a glow of golden mist that struck upon the northern pillars, throwing up a vague reflection that showed us something of the airy region in which the lines of the great arches met. We could catch a glimpse, too, of the white-dressed choir, beyond the sombre mass of the people that filled the nave. And when the hushed, deep tones of the organ prelude had ceased to sound along the lofty aisles, there rose the distant and plaintive chanting of the boys—then the richer tones of the bass came in—and then again burst forth that clear, sweet, triumphant soprano, that seemed to be but a single voice ringing softly and distantly through the great building. I knew what would occur then. Somehow Tita managed to slip away from us, and get into the shadow of the pillar, with her head bent down, and her hand clasped in Bell's; and the girl stood so that no one should see her friend's face, for there were tears running fast down it. It is a sad story, that has been already briefly mentioned in these memoranda. Many years ago she lost a young brother, to whom she was deeply attached. He used to sing in the choir of the village church. Now, whenever she listens to a choir singing that she cannot see, nothing will convince her that she does not hear the voice of her brother in the clear, distant music; and more than once it has happened that the uncontrollable emotions caused by this wild superstition have thoroughly unnerved her. For days after, she has been haunted by the sound of that voice, as if it had brought her a message from the other world—as if she had been nearly vouchsafed a vision that had been somehow snatched away from her, leaving behind an unexplained longing and unrest. Partly on that account, and partly by reason of the weariness produced by constant standing, we were not sorry to slip out of the Cathedral when the first portion

of the service was over; and so we found ourselves once more in the sweet air and the sunlight.

There was an awkward pause. Tita rather fell behind, and endeavoured to keep herself out of sight; while the other members of the party seemed uncertain as to how they should attach themselves. Fortunately, our first movement was to go round and inspect the curious remains of the old Cathedral, which are yet visible; and as these were close at hand, we started off in a promiscuous manner, and got round and under King Edgar's tower without any open rupture.

How still and quiet lay the neighbourhood of the great church on this beautiful Sunday morning! It seemed as if all the life of the place were gathered within that noble building; while out here the winds from over the meadows, and the sunlight, and the fleecy clouds overhead, were left to play about the strange old passages, and sunken arches, and massive gateways, and other relics of former centuries. The bright light that lay warm on the fresh grass, and on the ivied walls about, lit up the flaky red surface of the old tower, and showed us the bruised effigy of King Edgar in sharp outline; while through the gloom of the archway we could see beyond the shimmering green light of a mass of elms, with their leaves moving in the sun. From thence we passed down to the river wall, where the Lieutenant read aloud the following legend inscribed near the gate:—"On the 18th of November, 1770, the Flood rose to the lower edge of this Brass Plate, being ten inches higher than the Flood which happen'd on December 23, 1672." And then we went through the arch, and found ourselves on the banks of the Severn, with its bridges and boats and locks, and fair green meadows, all as bright and as cheerful as sunlight could make them.

Tita and myself, I know, would at this moment have given a good deal to get away from these young folks and their affairs. What business of ours was it that there should be a "third wheel to the cart," as the Germans say? Arthur was sadly out of place; but

how could we help it? My Lady having fallen rather behind as we started on our leisurely stroll along the river, Bell, the Lieutenant, and Arthur were forced to precede us. The poor girl was almost silent between them. Von Rosen was pointing out the various objects along the stream; Arthur, in no amiable mood, throwing in an occasional sarcastic comment. Then more silence. Arthur breaks away from them, and honours us with his company. Sometimes he listens to what my Lady says to him; but more often he does not, and only scowls at the two young folks in front of us. He makes irrelevant replies. There is a fierceness in his look. I think at this moment he would have been glad to have embraced Mormonism, or avowed his belief in Strauss, or done anything else desperate and wicked.

Why, it was natural to ask, should this gentle little woman by my side be vexed by these evil humours and perversities—her vexation taking the form of a profound compassion, and a desire that she could secure the happiness of everybody? The morning was a miracle of freshness. The banks of the Severn, once you leave Worcester, are singularly beautiful. Before us were islands, set amid tall river weeds, and covered with thick growths of bushes. A grey shimmering of willows came in as a line between the bold blue of the stream and the paler blue and white of the sky. Some tall poplars stood sharp and black against the light green of the meadows behind; and far away these level and sunlit meadows stretched over to Malvern Chase and to the thin line of blue hill along the horizon. Then the various boats—a group of richly-coloured cattle in the fields—a few boys bathing under the shadow of a great bank of yellow sand—all went to make up as bright and pretty a river-picture as one could wish for. And here we were almost afraid to speak, lest an incautious word should summon up thunder-clouds and provoke an explosion.

"Have you any idea when you will reach Scotland?" says Arthur, still glaring at the Lieutenant and his companion.

"No," replies Tita; "we are in no hurry."

"Won't you get tired of it?"

"I don't think so at all. But if we do, we can stop."

"You will go through the Lake Country, of course?"

"Yes."

"It is sure to be wet there," said the young man.

"You don't give us much encouragement," says my Lady, gently.

"Oh," he replies, "if people break away from the ordinary methods of enjoying a holiday, of course they must take their chance. In Scotland you are sure to have bad weather. It always rains there."

Arthur was determined that we should look upon the future stages of our journey with the most agreeable anticipations.

"Then," he says, "suppose your horses break down?"

"They won't," says Tita, with a smile. "They know they are going to the land of oats. They will be in excellent spirits all the way."

Master Arthur went on to add—

"I have always found that the worst of driving about with people was that it threw you so completely on the society of certain persons; and you are bound to quarrel with them."

"That has not been *our* experience," says my Lady, with that gracious manner of hers which means much.

Of course she would not admit that her playful skirmishes with the person whom, above all others, she ought to respect, could be regarded as real quarrels. But at this point the Lieutenant lingered for a moment to ask my Lady a question; and as Bell also stopped and turned, Tita says to him, with an air of infinite amusement—

"We have not quarrelled yet, Count von Rosen?"

"I hope not, Madame," says our Uhlan, respectfully.

"Because," she continued, with a little laugh, "Arthur thinks we are sure to disagree, merely on account of our being thrown so much into each other's company."

"I think quite the opposite will be the result of our society," says the Lieutenant.

"Of course I did not refer particularly to you," said Arthur, coldly. "There are some men so happily constituted that it is of no consequence to them how they are regarded by their companions. Of course they are always well satisfied."

"And it is a very good thing to be well satisfied," says the Lieutenant, cheerfully enough, "and much better than to be ill satisfied and of much trouble to your friends. I think, sir, when you are as old as I, and have been over the world as much, you will think more of the men who are well satisfied."

"I hope my experience of the world," says Arthur, with a certain determination in his tone, "will not be gained by receiving pay to be sent to invade a foreign country——"

"Oh, Count von Rosen," says Bell, to call his attention.

"Mademoiselle!" he says, turning instantly towards her, although he had heard every word of Arthur's speech.

"Can you tell me the German name of that tall pink flower down by the edge of the water?"

And so they walked on once more; and we got further away from the city—with its mass of slates and spires getting faint in the haze of the sunlight — and into the still greenness of the country, where the path by the river-side lay through deep meadows.

It was hard, after all. He had come from London to get speech of his sweetheart, and he found her walking through green meadows with somebody else. No mortal man—and least of all a young fellow not confident of his own position, and inclined to be rather nervous and anxious—could suffer this with equanimity; but then it was a question how far it was his own fault.

"Why don't you go and talk to Bell?" says my Lady to him, in a low voice.

"Oh, I don't care to thrust my society on anyone,"

he says aloud, with an assumption of indifference. "There are people who do not know the difference between an old friendship and a new acquaintance—I do not seek to interfere with their tastes. But of course there is a meaning in everything. What are those lines of Pope's—

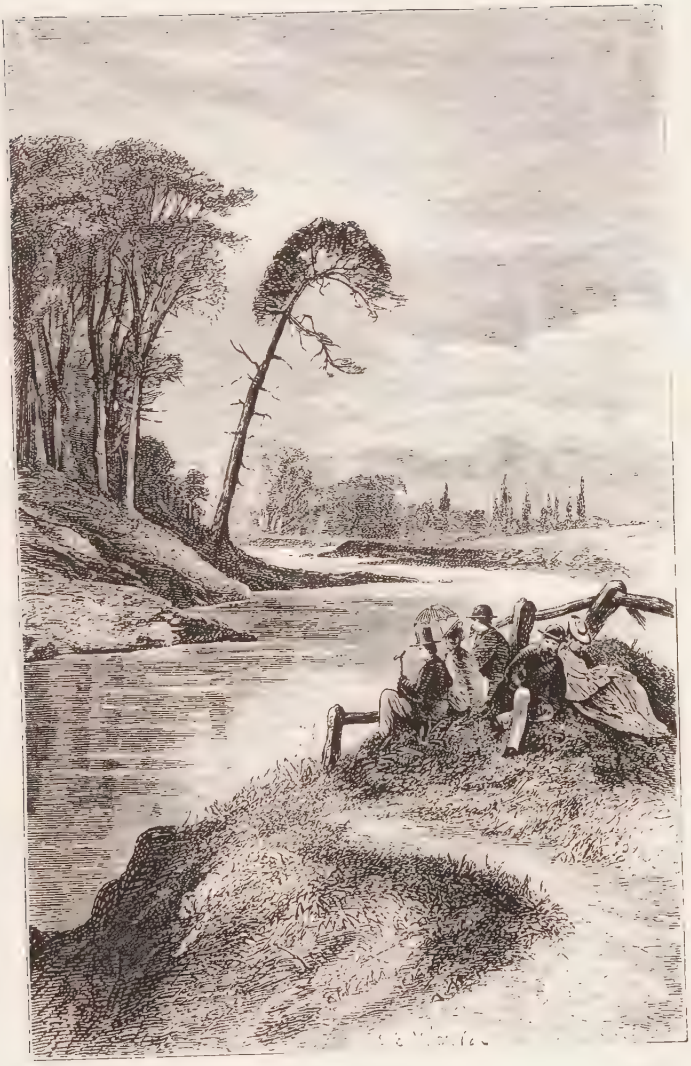
> "'O say, what stranger cause, yet unexplored,
> Could make a gentle belle reject a lord?'

I should not attempt to cure a woman of her instinctive liking for a title."

Tita placed her hand on his arm. After all, this excited young man was an old friend of hers; and it seemed a pity to see him thus determined to ruin his own cause. But the light talking we heard in front seemed to say that the "gentle Belle" had not overheard that pretty speech and its interesting quotation.

At length, coming to a sudden bend in the river, the Lieutenant and his companion proposed that we should rest for a while; and accordingly we chose out comfortable seats on the steep green bank, covered by bushes and trees, which here slopes down to the stream. The picture that lay before and around us was sufficient to have calmed the various moods and passions of these young folks, if they had but had eyes for anything but their own affairs. Bell was the only one who paid attention to the world of bright colours that lay around. The Lieutenant—imperturbable, easy in manner, and very attentive to her—was nevertheless obviously on the watch, and certain to resent any remark that might by chance miss him and glance by towards her. Certainly, these were not comfortable conditions for a pleasant walk. Tita afterwards declared that she was calculating with satisfaction that she had already got through several hours of that terrible day.

The sun was shining far away on the blue Malvern hills. Along the level meadows the lines of pollard willows were grey and silvery in the breezy light. Close at hand the rich masses of green were broken



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by the red sandstone bank opposite; while the tall trees above sent straggling duplicates of themselves—coloured in deep chocolate-brown—down into the lazy stream that flowed beneath us. And as we sat there and listened for the first ominous observation of one or another of these young folks, lo! there glided into the clear white and blue channel of the river a gaily-bedizened barge that gleamed and glittered in the sunlight and sent quivering lines of colour down into the water. The horse came slowly along the road. The long rope rustled over the brushwood on the bank, and splashed on the surface of the stream. The orange and scarlet bands of the barge stole away up and through that world of soft greenness that lay under the shadow of the opposite bank; and then the horse, and rope, and driver turned the corner of a field, and we saw them no more.

The appearance of the barge had provoked attention, and secured silence. When it was gone the Lieutenant turned carelessly to Arthur, and said—

"Do you go back to London to-morrow?"

"I don't know," said the young man, gloomily.

"It is such a pity you can't come with us, Arthur," says Bell, very gently, as if begging for a civil reply.

"I have no doubt you will enjoy yourselves very well," he replies, with a certain coldness in his tone.

"We have hitherto," she says, looking down; "the weather has been so good—and—and the scenery was so pleasant—and—and——"

It was Arthur himself, singularly enough, who came to the rescue, little knowing that he was affording her such relief.

"I don't think you have chosen the right road," he remarked. "The real reminiscences of the old stage-coach days you will find on the York and Berwick road to Scotland. I never heard of anyone going to Scotland this way."

"Why," says one of the party, with a laugh that seemed to startle the stillness around, "that is the very reason we chose it."

"I have been thinking for some time," he says coldly, "of getting a dog-cart and driving up the old route to Scotland."

The heavens did not fall on him. Queen Tita looked at the tips of her gloves, and said nothing; but Bell, having less of scepticism about her, immediately cried out—

"Oh, Arthur, don't do that; it will be dreadfully wretched for you, going away on such an excursion by yourself."

But the young man saw that his proposal—I will swear it had never entered his brain before that very minute—had produced an effect; and treated it as a definite resolve.

"At least, if you are going, you might as well come with us, or meet us further on, where the roads join," says Bell.

"No, I am not so mad as to go your way," he replied, with an air of disdain. "I shall keep out of the rainy districts, and I mean to go where one can find traces of the old times still hanging about."

"And pray," I venture to ask him, "are all the old inns confined to one part of this unfortunate country? And were there no ways of getting to Scotland but by York and Berwick? Why, over the whole country there is a network of routes along which stage-coaches used to run. And if you should be tired of driving alone, you can do no better than strike across country from York by the old coach-road that comes on to Penrith, and so go up with us through Carlisle and Moffat on to Edinburgh."

"I am not so sure that I shall go alone," he said, quite fiercely.

What did the boy mean? Was he going to drive a white elephant about the country?

"Do you know much of the management of horses?" says the Lieutenant, meaning no harm whatever.

"Arthur is in the volunteer artillery,—the field artillery, do they call it?—and of course he has to manage horses," explains my Lady.

"Oh, you are a volunteer?" said the Lieutenant with quite an accession of interest. "That is a very good thing. I think all the young men of this country would do much good to their health and their knowledge by being volunteers and serving a time of military service."

"But we don't like compulsion here," says Arthur, bluntly.

"That," retorts the Lieutenant, with a laugh, "is why you are at present a very ill-educated country."

"At all events," says Arthur, rather hotly, "we are educated well enough to have thrown aside the old superstitions of feudalism and divine right; and we are too well educated to suffer a despotic government and a privileged aristocracy to have it all their own way."

"Oh, you do talk of Prussia, yes?" said the Count. 'Well, we are not perfect in Prussia. We have many things to learn and to do, that we might have done if we had been preserved round about by the sea, like you. But I think we have done very well for all that: and if we have a despotic government, which I do not think, it is perhaps because what is good for England is not always good for every other country; and if we have an aristocracy, they work for the country just like the sons of the peasants, when they go into the army, and get small pay, instead of going abroad like your aristocracy, and gambling away their fortunes to the Jews and the horse dealers, and getting into debt and making very much fools of themselves."

"When we of this country," says Arthur, proudly, "see the necessity of military preparations, we join the ranks of a body that accepts no pay, but is none the less qualified to fight when that is wanted."

"Oh, I do say nothing against your volunteers. No, on the contrary, I think it is an excellent thing for the young men. And it would be better if the service was continuous for one, two, or three years—and they go away into barrack life—and have much drill and exercise in the open air, and make the young

men of the cities hardy and strong. That would be a very good army then, I think; for when the men are intelligent and educated, they have less chance of panic—which is the worst that can happen in a battle —and they will not skulk away, or lose their courage, because they have so much self-respect. But I do not know whether this is safer—to have the more ignorant men of the peasantry and country people who will take their drill like machines and go through it all, and continue firing in great danger, because they are like machines. Now, if you had your towns fighting against the country, and if you had your town volunteers and your country regiments with the same amount of instruction, I think the country troops would win, although each man might not have as much patriotism and education and self-respect as in the town soldiers. Because the country troops would march long distances—and would not be hurt much by rain or the sleeping out at night—and they would go through their duties like machines when the fight commenced. But your city volunteers—they have not yet got anything like the training of your regular troops that come from the country villages and towns."

"I know this," says Arthur, "that if there was to be an invasion of this country by Prussia, a regiment of our city volunteers would not be afraid to meet a regiment of your professional soldiers, however countrified and mechanical they may be——"

"Ah, but that is a great mistake you make," says the Lieutenant, taking no notice of the challenge; "our soldiers are not of any single class—they are from all classes, from all towns, and villages, and cities alike—much more like your volunteers than your regular soldiers, only that they have some more drill and experience than your volunteers. And what do you say of an invasion? I have heard some people talk of that nonsense—but only in England. Is it that you are afraid of invasion that you imagine these foolish things, and talk so much of it?"

"No, we are not afraid of it——" says Arthur, evidently casting about for some biting epigram.

"Yet no one in all Europe speaks or thinks of such a thing but a few of your people here, who give great amusement to us at home."

"There would be amusement of another sort going," says Arthur, getting a little red.

And just at this instant, before he has time to finish the sentence, Tita utters a little scream. A stone has splashed into the stream beneath us. The author of the menace is unknown—being probably one of a gang of young rascals hidden behind the bushes on the other side of the river—but it is certainly not anger that dwells in my Lady's bosom with regard to that concealed enemy. He has afforded her relief at a most critical moment; and now she prevents Arthur returning to the subject by proposing that we should walk back to Worcester; her suggestion being fully understood to be a command.

We set out. The Lieutenant wilfully separates himself from Bell. He joins us elderly folks on the pretence of being much interested in this question of Volunteer service—and Bell and Arthur are perforce thrown together. They walk on in front of us, in rather an embarrassed way. Bell's looks are cast down; Arthur speaks in a loud voice, to let us know that he is only talking about the most common-place affairs. But at the first stile we go through, they manage to fall behind; and when, at intervals, we turn to see how the river and the meadows and the groves of trees look in the sunshine, we find the distance between us and the young couple gradually increasing, until they are but two almost undistinguishable figures pacing along the banks of the broad stream.

"Well, we have got so far over the day!" said my Lady, with a sigh. "But I suppose we must ask him to dine with us."

"Is it necessary, Madame?" says the Lieutenant. "But perhaps you might ask him to bring better manners with him."

"I am afraid he has been very rude to you," said Tita, with some show of compunction.

"To me? No. That is not of any consequence whatever, but I did think that all this pleasant walk has been spoiled to Mademoiselle and yourself by —by what shall I say?—not rudeness, but a fear of rudeness. And yet, what reason is there for it?"

"I don't know," was the reply, uttered in rather a low voice. "But I hope Bell is not being annoyed by him now."

You see, that was the way in which they had got to regard this unfortunate youth—as a sort of necessary evil, which was to be accepted with such equanimity as Heaven had granted to the various sufferers. It never occurred to them to look at the matter from Arthur's point of view, or to reflect that there was probably no more wretched creature in the whole of England than he was during this memorable Sunday.

Consider how he spent the day. It was the one day on which he would have the chance of seeing Bell for an unknown period. He comes round in the morning to find her sitting at breakfast with his rival. He accompanies them on a walk into the country; finds himself "the third wheel to the cart," and falls behind to enjoy the spectacle of seeing her walk by the side of this other man, talking to him and sharing with him the beautiful sights and sounds around. Ye who have been transfixed by the red-hot skewers of jealousy, think of the torture which this wretched young man suffered on this quiet Sunday morning. Then as he walks home with her, he finds her, as we afterwards learn, annoyed about certain remarks of his. He explains in a somewhat saucy manner, and makes matters worse. Then he takes to reproaches, and bids her reflect on what people will say; and here again he goes from one blunder to another in talking in such a fashion to a proud and high-spirited girl, who cannot suffer herself to be suspected. In his blindness of anger and jealousy, he endeavours to

asperse the character of the Lieutenant—he is like other officers—every one knows what the Prussian officers, in general, are—what is the meaning of this thing, and the dark suspicion suggested by that. To all of these representations Bell replies with some little natural warmth. He is driven wild by her defence of his rival. He declares that he knows something about the Lieutenant's reputation—and then she, probably with a little paleness in her face, stands still, and asks him calmly to say what it is. He will not. He is not going to carry tales. Only, when an English lady has so little care of what people may say as to accept this foreign adventurer as her companion during a long journey——

That was all that Bell subsequently told Tita. The boy was obviously mad and reckless, but none the less he had wrought such mischief as he little dreamed of in uttering these wild complaints and suspicions. When we got back to the hotel, he and Bell had overtaken us, and they had the appearance of not being on the best of terms. In fact, they had maintained silence for the last quarter of an hour of the walk.

My Lady asked Arthur to dine with us at seven; so that during the interval he was practically dismissed. Seven came, and Arthur appeared. He was in evening dress; conveying a rebuke to uncouth people like ourselves, who were in our ordinary travelling costume. But Bell's seat was vacant. After we had waited a few minutes, Queen Tita went to inquire for her, and in a few minutes returned.

"Bell is very sorry, but she has a headache, and would rather not come down to dinner."

Arthur looked up with an alarmed face; the Lieutenant scowled; and Tita, taking her seat, said she was afraid we had walked too far in the morning. Strange. If you had seen our Bell walking lightly up to the top of Box-hill and running down again—just by way of amusement before lunch—you would not have expected that a short walk of a mile or two along

a level river-course would have had such an effect. But so it was; and we had dinner before us.

It was not an enlivening meal; and the less said about it the better. Arthur talked much of his driving to Scotland in a dog-cart, and magnified the advantages of the York route over that we were now following. It is quite certain that he had never thought of such a thing before that morning; but the attention that had been drawn to it, and the manner in which he had been led to boast of it, promised actually to commit him to this piece of folly. The mere suggestion of it had occurred at the impulse of a momentary vexation; but the more he talked of it, the more he pledged himself to carry out his preposterous scheme. Tita heard and wondered, scarcely believing; but I could see plainly that the young man was determined to fulfil his promise if only by way of triumphant bravado, to show his independence of us, and perhaps inspire Bell with envy and regret.

When he left that night, something was said about his coming to see us away on the following morning. Tita had shown her usual consideration in not referring at all to our drive of the next day, which she understood was to be through the most charming scenery. And when, that same night, she expressed a vague desire that we might slip away on the next morning before Arthur had come, it was with no thought of carrying such a plan into execution. Perhaps she thought with some pity of the young man who, after seeing us drive away again into the country, and the sweet air, and the sunlight, would return disconsolately to his dingy rooms in the Temple, there to think of his absent sweetheart, or else to meditate that wild journey along a parallel line which was to show her that he, too, had his enjoyments.

[*Note.*—I find that the remarks which Queen Titania appended to the foregoing pages when they were written, have since been torn off; and I can guess the reason. A few days ago I received a letter, sent under cover to the publishers, which bore the address of that portion of the country familiarly called "the Dukeries." It was written in a feminine hand, and signed with a family name which has some his-

torical pretensions. Now these were the observations which this silly person in high places had to communicate :—"*Sir, I hope you will forgive my intruding myself upon you in this way; but I am anxious to know whether you really do think living with such a woman as your wife is represented to be, is really a matter for* raillery and amusement. *My object in writing to you is to say that, if you can treat lightly the fact of a wife being waspish at every turn, cuffing her boys' ears, and talking of whipping, it would have been better not to have made your* extraordinary *complaisance public; for what is to prevent the most ill-tempered woman pointing to these pages, and saying that that is how a* reasonable *husband would deal with her? If it is your misfortune to have an ill-tempered wife, you ought not to try to persuade people that you are rather proud of it. Pray forgive my writing thus frankly to you; and I am, Sir, your obedient servant,* ——— ———." By a great mischance I left this lying letter open on the breakfast-table; and Tita, coming in, and being attracted by the crest in gold and colours on the paper, took it up. With some dismay, I watched her read it. She let it down—stood irresolute for a moment, with her lips getting rather tremulous—then she suddenly fled into the haven she had often sought before in her troubles, and looking up with the clear brown eyes showing themselves frightened and pained, like those of some dumb creature struck to the heart, she said, "Is it true? Am I really ill-tempered? Do I really vex you very much?" You may be sure that elderly lady up in Nottinghamshire had an evil quarter of an hour of it when we proceeded to discuss the question, and when Queen Tita had been pacified and reassured. "But we ought to have known," she said. "Count von Rosen warned us that stupid persons would make the mistake. And to say that I cuffed my boys' ears! Why, you know that even in the *Magazine* it says that I cuffed the boys and kissed them at the same time—of course, in fun—and I threatened to whip the whole house—of course, in fun, you know, when everybody was in good spirits about going away—and now that wicked old woman would make me out an unnatural mother, and a bad wife, and I don't know what! I—I—I will get Bell to draw a portrait of her, and put it in an exhibition—that would serve her right." And forthwith she sat down and wrote to the two boys at Twickenham, promising them I know not what luxuries and extravagances when they came home for the Easter holidays. But she is offended with the public, all through that gabbling old lady in Notts; and will have no more communication with it, at least for the present.]

## CHAPTER XIII.

### SAVED!

"Unto the great Twin Brethren
We keep this solemn feast.
Swift, swift the great Twin Brethren
Came spurring from the east!"

CASTOR and Pollux did us notable service that morning at Worcester. Arthur was coming round to see Bell

before we started. Queen Tita was oppressed by anxious fears; and declared that now the great crisis had come, and that the young man from Twickenham would demand some pledge from Bell as he bade her good-bye. The dread of this danger drove the kindly little woman into such exaggerations of his misconduct of yesterday that I began to wonder if this Arthur were really the same lad she used to pet and think so much of when he came down to Leatherhead and dawdled with my Lady and Bell along the Surrey lanes of an evening. What had changed him since then?

"You are pleased to be profound," says Tita, abruptly.

Well, I was only pointing out to her that one of the chief accomplishments of life is consideration for the sick; and that whereas nearly all women seem to have an inherited instinct that way, men only acquire the habit as the result of experience and reflection. Indeed, with most women, the certain passport to their interest and kindliness is to be unwell and exact a great deal of patient service from them. Now—I was saying to Tita, when she uttered that unnecessary rebuke—why don't women show the same consideration to those who are mentally ailing?—to the unfortunate persons whose vexed and irritated brain renders them peevish and ill-tempered? Once get a patient down with fever, and all his fractious complainings are soothed, and all his querulous whims are humoured. But when the same man is rendered a little insane by meeting with a disappointment—or if he is unable to stand being crossed in argument, so that the mildest statement about some such contested subject as the American War, Governor Eyre, or the Annexation of Alsace, sends a flash of flame through his head—why should not the like allowance be made for his infirmities? Why should the man who is ill-tempered because of a fever be humoured, caressed, and coaxed; and the man who is ill-tempered because his reason is liable to attacks of

passion, be regarded as an ill-conditioned boor, not fit for the society of well-bred ladies and gentlemen?

"I think," says Tita, with a little warmth, "you do nothing now but try to invent excuses for Arthur. And it is not fair. I am very sorry for him if he is so vexed that he loses his temper; but that does not excuse his being absolutely rude."

"But his rudeness is part of his ailment," I venture to say. "Ordinarily, he is the mildest and gentlest of young men, who would shrink from a charge of rudeness as the worst thing you could urge against him. At present he is off his head. He does not know what he says—or rather, he is incapable of controlling his utterances. He is really sick with a fever—though it isn't one of those, apparently, that secure the commiseration of even the most angelic of women."

I regarded that last expression as rather effective; but no. My Lady remarked that she was not accustomed to the treatment of the insane; and that another day such as that she had just passed would soon make her as ill as himself.

Our Bonny Bell did not seem so disturbed as might have been expected. When we went down to the coffee-room we found the Lieutenant and her sitting at opposite sides of a small table, deeply engaged over a sheet of paper. On our entrance the document was hastily folded up and smuggled away.

"It is a secret," said the Lieutenant, anticipating inquiry. "You shall not know until we are away on our journey again. It is a packet to be opened in a quiet place—no houses near, no persons to listen; and then—and then——"

"Perhaps it will remain a secret? *Bien!* Life is not long enough to let one meddle with secrets; they take up so much time in explanation, and then they never contain anything."

"But this is a very wonderful thing," said the Lieutenant, "and you must hurry to get away from Worcester that you shall hear of it."

We were, however, to have another sealed packet that morning. Master Arthur, knowing full well that he would have but little chance of speaking privately with Bell, had entrusted his thoughts to a piece of paper and an envelope; and just as we were in the hurry of departure, the young man appeared. The truth was, the Lieutenant had ordered the horses to be put in some quarter of an hour before the time we had said we should start; and my Lady showed so much anxiety to set forth at once that I saw she hoped to leave before Arthur came.

The phaeton stood in the archway of the hotel, and on the stone steps were flung the rugs and books.

"My dear," says Tita, rather anxiously, to Bell, "do get in! The horses seem rather fresh, and—and——"

"Won't you wait to bid good-bye to Arthur?" says Bell.

"It is impossible to say when he will come—he will understand—I will leave a message for him," says Queen Titania, all in a breath; and with that the Lieutenant assists Bell to get up in front.

I have the reins in my hand, awaiting orders. The last rugs are thrown up, books stowed away, everything in readiness; Tita takes her seat behind, and the Lieutenant is on the point of getting up.

At this moment Arthur comes round the corner, is amazed for a moment to see us ready to start, and then suddenly brings out a letter.

"Bell," he says. "I—I have—there is something here I want you to see—only a moment, and you can give me an answer now—yes or no——"

The unfortunate young man was obviously greatly excited; his face quite pale, and his speech rapid and broken. He handed up the letter: the crisis that Tita had endeavoured to avoid had come. But in this our darkest hour—as I have already hinted—Castor and Pollux came to the rescue. It was the battle of the Lake Regillus acted once again in the gateway of the Worcester Star Hotel. For Pollux, casting his head

about and longing to start, managed to fix his bit on the end of the pole; and, of course, a wild scene ensued. Despite the efforts of the ostler, the horse threw himself back on his haunches; the phaeton described a curve, and was driven against the wall with a loud crash; the people about fled in every direction, and the Lieutenant jumped out and sprang to the horses' heads. Pollux was still making violent efforts to extricate himself, and Castor, having become excited, was plunging about; so that for a moment it seemed as though the vehicle would be shattered in pieces against the wall of the court. The women were quite still, except that Tita uttered a little suppressed cry as she saw the Lieutenant hanging on to the rearing horses. He stuck manfully to their heads, and, with the assistance of the ostler, at last managed to get the bit off. Then both horses sprang forward. It would have been impossible to have confined them longer in this narrow place. The Lieutenant leaped in behind; and the next moment the phaeton was out in the main street of Worcester, both horses plunging and pulling so as to turn all eyes towards us. Certainly, it was a good thing the thoroughfare was pretty clear. The great Twin Brethren, not knowing what diabolical occurrence had marked their setting out, were speeding away from the place with might and main; and with scarcely a look at Worcester we found ourselves out in the country again, amid quiet and wooded lanes, with all the sweet influences of a bright summer morning around us.

"I hope you are not hurt," said my Lady to the Lieutenant, who was looking about to see whether the smash had taken some of the paint off, or done other damage.

"Oh, not in the least, Madame," he said, "but I find that one of my boots is cut, so that I think the shoe of the horse must have done it. And has he caught on the pole before?"

"Only once," she says.

"Then I would have the bit made with bars across, so that it will be more difficult; for suppose this did

happen in the road, and there was a ditch, and he backed you——"

"I suppose we should go over," remarked Queen Tita, philosophically. "But it is strange how often accidents in driving might occur, and how seldom they do occur. But we must really have the bit altered."

"Well," I say to my gentle companion, "what message did you leave with Arthur?"

"I could not leave any," said Bell, "for of course when the horses went back, he had to get out of their way. But he will understand that I will write to him."

"Have you read the letter?"

"No."

"Do, like a good girl, and have it over. That is always the best way. You must not go into this beautiful country that lies ahead with a sort of cloud over you."

So Bell took out the letter, and furtively opened it. She read it carefully over, without uttering a word; then she continued looking at it for a long time.

"I am very glad that accident occurred," she remarked, in a low voice. "He said I was to answer 'yes' or 'no.' I could not do that to such a letter as this; and if I had refused, he would have been very much hurt. I will write to him from whatever place we stop at to-night."

This resolution seemed greatly to comfort her. If any explanation were needed, it was postponed until the evening; and in the meantime we had fine weather, fresh air, and all the bright colours of an English landscape around us. Bell rapidly resumed her ordinary good spirits. She begged to have the reins; and when these had been handed over to her, with various cautions, the excitement of driving a pair of horses that yet showed considerable signs of freshness brought a new colour into her cheeks. The route which we now followed was one of the prettiest we had yet met with. Instead of following the old stage-coach route by Droitwich, we struck almost due north by a line of small and picturesque villages lying buried in the heart of

this deeply-wooded country. The first of these was Ombersley—a curious little clump of cottages, nearly all of which were white, with black bars of woodwork crossed and re-crossed; and they had odd gables, and lattices, and decorations, so that they looked almost like toy-cottages. Wearing white and black in this prominent way, our Uhlan immediately claimed them as Prussian property; but beyond the fact of their showing the Prussian colours, there was little else foreign-looking about those old-fashioned English houses lying along this level lane, and half hidden amid elms. As we got up into the higher ground above Ombersley we found around us a very pleasant landscape; and it seemed to strike my gentle-eyed companion that the names of the villages around had been chosen to accord with the tender and sylvan beauties of this pretty piece of country. One of the sign-posts we passed had inscribed on it, "To Doverdale and Hampton Lovett." Then in the neighbourhood are Elmley Lovett, Elmbridge, Crossway Green, and Gardeners' Grove; while down between these runs Doverdale Brook, skirting Westmoor Park, the large house of which we could see as a faint blue mound amid the general leafage. The country, which is flat about Ombersley, gets more undulating about Hartlebury and on towards Kidderminster. The roads wind up and down gentle hills, with tall and ruddy banks of sand on each side, which are hanging with every variety of wild flower and wayside weed. On both hands dense woods come down to these tall and picturesque banks; and you drive through an atmosphere laden with moist and resinous scents.

It was fortunate for us, indeed, that before starting we had lived for a time in town; for all the various perfumes of the hedges and fields came upon us with a surprise. Every now and again, on these cool and breezy mornings, we would drive past a hay-field, with the fresh and sweet odours blowing all around. Or perhaps it was a great clump of wild-rose bushes that filled the air with delicate scent. Then the lime-trees were in flower; and who does not know the delight of pass-

ing under the boughs laden with blossom, when the bees are busy overhead? More rarely, but still frequently enough in this favoured country, a whiff of honeysuckle was borne to us as we passed. And if these things sweetened the winds that blew about us, consider what stars of colour refreshed the eye as we drove gently past the tall hedgerows and borders of woods—the golden rock-roses, purple patches of wild thyme, the white glimmering of stitchwort and campion, the yellow spires of the snapdragon, and a thousand others. And then, when we ceased to speak, there was no blank of silence. Away over the hay-field the lark floated in the blue, making the air quiver with his singing; the robin, perched on a fence, looked at us saucily, and piped a few notes by way of remark; the blackbird was heard, flute-throated, down in the hollow recesses of the woods; and the thrush, in a holly-tree by the wayside, sang out his sweet, clear song, that seemed to rise in strength as the wind awoke a sudden rustling through the long woods of birch and oak.

"Well, touching that sealed packet?" says my Lady, aloud.

"Oh no, Madame," replies the Lieutenant. "This is not the time for it. If I must tell you the truth, it is only a drinking-song I have been trying to remember of a young Englishman who was at Bonn with me; and Mademoiselle was so good this morning as to alter some of the words. But now?—a drinking-song in this fine, quiet country?—No. After we have got to Kidderminster, and when we drive away after lunch, then Mademoiselle will play for you the air I did show to her, and I will sing you the song. All what is needed is that you drink some Rhine wine at Kidderminster to make you like the song."

"Kidderminster Rhine wine!" exclaims one of the party, with a groan. He knows that whatever is suggested now by the Lieutenant finds favour with a clear majority of the party.

"That was a very good young fellow," continues the Lieutenant, as we drive over a high slope, and come

in view of a mass of manufactories. "Very big and strong he was; we did call him *der grosse Engländer* always; and one time, in the winter, when there was much snow, we had a supper-party at his room. We had many duels then, for we were only boys, but the Englishman was not supposed to be challenged, for he knew nothing of our swords, but he was always ready to fight with his fists for all that. And this evening, I am afraid we did drink too much beer, and young Schweitzer of Magdeburg—he died at Königgrätz, the unfortunate, in '66—he was very angry with the Engländer for laughing at his sweetheart, who was but a young lady in a school there. And he challenged the Englishman, and went up to him, and said he would not go away until there was a fight; and do you know what your countryman did? He lifted Schweitzer up in his arms, like a baby, and carried him down the stairs, and opened the door, and put him in the snow outside, very gently. There was so much laughing over that, that we all said it was very good; and Schweitzer was grown sober by the cool of the snow; and he laughed too, and I think they swore *brüderschaft* about it afterwards. Oh, he was a very clever fellow, your countryman, and had more delight in our songs than any German I ever knew. But do you know how that is?"

Madame said it was no wonder anyone should be in love with the German songs; but the Lieutenant shook his head.

"That is not it at all: no. This is it—that when you know only a little of a language, you do not know what is commonplace in it. The simple phrase which is commonplace to others that is all full of meaning to you. So I find it with your English. You would laugh if I told you that I find much meaning in poetry that you think only good for children, and in old-fashioned writing, which looks affected now. Because, Madame, is it not true that all commonplace phrases meant some new thing at one time? It is only my ignorance that I do not know they have grown old and worth little. Now the evening at Twickenham I did hear you go

over the names of old-fashioned English songs, and much fun was made of the poetry. But to me, that was very good—a great deal of it—because nothing in English is to me commonplace as yet."

"How fortunate you must be," says one of us, with a sigh.

"You laugh when you say, '*Flow on, thou shining river!*' Why? The river flows: and it shines. I see a clear picture out of the words—like the man who wrote them; I am not accustomed to them so as to think them stupid. Then I saw you laugh when some one said, '*I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls.*' I did read that song; and although it is stupid that the man thinks he will live in marble halls, I found much tenderness in it. So with this young Englishman. He knew nothing of what was commonplace in our language. If you gave him children's rhymes, he looked at the meaning; and judged it all by that. And when we showed him stiff, artificial verses of old times, he seemed to go back to the time when they were written, and believe much in them, and like them. That is a very good thing in ignorance, I think—when you know not much of a language, and every word has much meaning in it, and there is no commonplace anywhere."

This lecture of the Lieutenant took us into Kidderminster. What married man is not familiar with the name—held up to him as an awful threat in reply to his grumblings about the price of Turkey and Brussels carpets? As we drove into the busy town, signs of the prevailing manufacture were everywhere apparent in the large red-brick factories. We put up at the "Lion," and while Von Rosen went off to buy himself a new pair of boots, we went for a stroll up to the interesting old church, the fine brasses and marble monuments of which have drawn many a stranger to the spot. Then we climbed to the top of the tower, and from the zinc roof thereof had a spacious view over the level and wooded country, which was deeply streaked by bands of purple, where the clouds threw their shadows. Far

below us lay the red, busy, smoky town set amid green fields; while the small river ran through it like a black snake, for the bed had been drained, and in the dark mud a multitude of boys could be seen wading, scooping about for eels. When we descended, Von Rosen had got his boots, and was prowling about the churchyard, reading the curious inscriptions there. One of them informed the world of the person laid beneath that, "added to the character of a Gentleman, his actions were coeval with his Integrity, Hospitality, and Benevolence." But our amiable guide, who had pointed out to us all the wonderful features of Kidderminster and its neighbourhood, evidently looked on one particular grave-stone as the chief curiosity of the place; for this, he informed us, was placed over a man who had prepared the vault and the inscription ten years before his death. Here is the legend:—

"To the Memory of
JOHN ORTON,
A MAN FROM LEICESTERSHIRE,
And when he is dead he must lie under HERE."

The man from Leicestershire was not "alone among mortals" in anticipating his end in this fashion; but no matter. A man may well be allowed to humour himself in the way of a tombstone; it is the last favour he can ask from the world.

"Now," said the Lieutenant, as we drove away from this manufacturing town into the fresh country again, "shall I sing you the song which the young Englishman used to sing for us; or shall we wait until the evening?"

"Now, by all means," said Bell; "and if you will be so good as to give me out the guitar, I will try to play you an accompaniment."

"A guitar accompaniment to a drinking-song!" says Titania.

"Oh, but this is not a drinking-song, exactly, Madame—it is a very moral song; and we shall discuss each verse as it goes along, and you will make alterations of it."

So he got out the guitar. We were now far away from any houses—all around us great woods, that lay dark and green under a clouded afternoon sky. The road was very hilly; and sometimes, from the summit of a great height, we caught a glimpse of a long western stretch of country, lying blue and misty under the grey sky. Behind us Kidderminster looked like a dusky red splatch in a plain of green; and all around it the meadows and fields were low and intense in colour. But then in the west we could see an occasional glimpse of yellow in the pall of cloud; and we hoped the sunset would break through the veil.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the Lieutenant, "the song I am about to sing to you——"

Here Bell began to play a light prelude; and without further introduction our Uhlan startled the silence of the woods and fields by singing, in a profound and melancholy voice, the first two verses of the ballad composed by the young Englishman at Bonn, which ran somewhat as follows:—

"Oh, Burgundy isn't a good thing to drink,
Young man, I beseech you, consider and think,
Or else in your nose, and likewise in your toes,
You'll discover the colour of Burgundy rose:
Burgundy rose, Burgundy rose,
A dangerous symptom is Burgundy rose.

"'Tis a very nice wine, and as mellow as milk,
'Tis a very nice colour, in satin or silk;
But you'll change your opinion as soon as it shows
In a halo around the extreme of your nose:
Burgundy rose, Burgundy rose,
Is a very bad thing at the tip of your toes."

"Well, Madame, how do you like it so far as we have got?" says the Lieutenant, as Bell is extemporising a somewhat wild variation of the air.

"I think your young English friend gave you very good advice; and I have no doubt the students needed it very much."

"But you shall hear what he says; he was not a teetotaller at all."

And therewith the Lieutenant continued:—

"If tipple you must, in beer, spirits, or wine,
There are wholesome vintages hail from the Rhine;
And, take the advice of a fellow who knows,
Hochheimer's as gentle as any that goes—
Burgundy rose, Burgundy rose,
Doth never appear from the wine I propose.

"Oh, Burgundy isn't a good thing to drink,
Young man, I beseech you, consider and think,
Or else in your nose, and likewise in your toes,
You'll discover the colour of Burgundy rose:
Burgundy rose, Burgundy rose,
A fatal affliction is Burgundy rose!"

"Oh, you two scapegraces!" cried Queen Titania. "I know now why you were laying your heads together this morning, and poring over that sheet of paper; you were engaged in perverting an honest and well-intentioned song into a recommendation of German wines. I am sure that third verse is not in the original. I am certain the young English student never wrote it. It was written in Worcester this very morning; and I call on you to produce the original, so that we may cut out this very bad moral that has been introduced."

"The original, Madame?" said the Lieutenant, gravely. "There is no original. I have repeated it most from memory—as he used to sing it at Bonn—and I put it down on paper only that Mademoiselle might correct me about the words. No—I have put in no moral. You think your countryman did not like the Rhine wines? Pfui!—you should have seen him drink them then, if he did not like them! And the very dear ones, too, for he had plenty of money; and we poor devils of the Germans used to be astonished at his extravagance, and sometimes he was called 'milord' for a joke. When we did go to his room to the supper-parties, we could not believe that any young man not come of age should have so much money given to him by his parents. But it did not spoil him one bit; he was as good, frank, careless as any man, and when he did get to know the language better he worked hard, and had such notes of the lectures as not anyone, I think, in the whole university had."

A strange thing now occurred. We were driving along level and wooded lanes, running parallel with the Severn. The small hamlets we passed, merely two or three houses smothered in elms, are appropriately named greens—Fen Green, Dodd's Green, Bard's Green, and the like; and on either side of us were lush meadows, with the cattle standing deep in the grass. Now all at once that long bar of glimmering yellow across the western clouds burst asunder; and at the same moment a glare of light shone along the southern sky, where there was evidently abundant rain. We had no sooner turned to look at this flood of golden mist, than all around us there was a stir in the hedges and the tall elms by the roadside—we were enveloped in sunshine; with it came a quick pattering on the leaves; and then we found the air glittering with white drops and slanting streaks. In the wild glare of the sunlight the shower shone and sparkled around us, and the heavier it fell—until the sound of it was like the hissing of the sea on a pebbly beach—the more magical grew the effects of the mingled light and wet. Nor was it a passing shower merely. The air was still filled with the gleaming lines of the rain, the sunlight still shone mistily through it and lit up the green meadows and the trees with a wonderful radiance, as we wrapped cloaks round our companions and drove leisurely on. It was impossible to think that this luminous rain could wet us like ordinary rain. But by and by it drew itself off; and then Bell, with a sudden little cry, besought the Lieutenant to pull up the horses.

Had we driven under a cloud, and escaped at the other edge? Close behind us there was still mingled rain and sunlight; but beyond that again the sky was heaped up with immense dark blue masses. A rainbow shone in front of this black background. A puff of white cloud ran across the darkness, telling of contrary winds. And then when we turned from this gleaming and glowing picture to continue our course, lo! all the west had cleared, and a great dim smoke of yellow lay over the land, where the sky came down.

"It is like the sea, is it not?" said Bell, rising up in the phaeton and steadying herself to look into this distant world of gold. "Don't you expect to find the masts of ships and sea-birds flying about out there?"

And then in the cool and fresh evening, with the dusk coming on, we drove up the valley of the Severn, by Quat and Quatford, towards our resting-place for the night. As we passed by Quatford Castle, the river, lying amid the dark meadows, had caught a glow of crimson fire from the last reflection of the sunset. A blue mist lay about the sides of the abrupt hill on which the town of Bridgenorth is pitched; but as we wound round the hill to gain the easiest ascent, we came again into the clear, metallic glow of the west. It was a hard pull on the horses, just at the end of their day's work, was this steep and circuitous ascent; but at length we got into the rough streets of the old town, and in the fading twilight sought out the yellow and comfortable glow of the Crown Hotel.

We had got in passing a vague glimpse of a wide space around an old town-house, with a small crowd of people collecting. They had come to hear the playing of a Volunteer band. Therefore, as we sat down to dinner, we had some very good music being played to us from without; and when at last it was gone, and the quaint old town on the top of the hill left to its ordinary silence, we found it was time to light our cigars and open the bézique-box.

Probably no one noticed it; but it is a curious circumstance that Bell had apparently forgotten all about her determination to write to Arthur. There was no shadow of a cloud on her face, and she enjoyed the winning of various games—assisted thereto by the obvious ministrations of the Lieutenant—with as much delight and careless amusement as though there was not anywhere in the world a young man sitting in his solitary chamber and wishing that he had never been born. But it was certainly not hard-heartedness that gave to Bell the enjoyment of that one evening.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A SHREWSBURY PLAY.

"But (trust me, gentles !) never yet
Was dight a masquing half so neat,
Or half so rich before ;
The country lent the sweet perfumes,
The sea the pearl, the sky the plumes,
The town its silken store."

THE Lieutenant was pensive. He and I had gone out for a turn before breakfast, and wandered on to the high promenade which, skirting one portion of the lofty town, looked down on the valley of the Severn, the huddled houses underneath the rocky height, and the bridge spanning the stream. It was a bright and cool morning; and the landscape that lay around was shining in the sun.

"England," he said, leaning his arms on the stone parapet of the walk, "is a very pleasant country to live in, I think."

I thanked him for the compliment.

"You are very free in your actions here: you do what you please. Only consider how you are at this moment."

But I had to protest against our young Prussian friend continually regarding this excursion as the normal condition of our existence. I showed him that we were not always enjoying ourselves in this fashion; that a good deal of hard work filled the long interval of the winter months; and that even Bell—whom he had grown to regard as a sort of feature of English scenery—a wild bird for ever on the wing through sunlight and green leaves—worked as hard as any of us.

"It is pleasant to be able to play dexterously on the piano, or the guitar, or what not, but that accomplishment means imprisonment with hard labour stretching over years. It is very nice to be able to put on a sheet of paper, with a few rapid touches, the outlines

of a scene which delights you, and to find yourself able to reproduce this afterwards in water or oil, and have it publicly exhibited and sold; but do you know how much work it involves? Bell is a most untiring young woman, I promise you, and not likely to fall asleep in counting her fingers."

"Oh, I am sure of that," he said, absently. "She has too much spirit, too much life, to be indolent. But I was thinking—I was thinking whether, if a man was to change his country, he would choose England out of all the other countries to live in. Here it is. Your people in England who only enjoy themselves must be very rich, must they not? Is it a good country, I wonder, for a man who would have about 800*l.* a year?"

"Not without some occupation. But why do you ask?"

He only stared at the bushes down below us on the rocks, and at the river far below them.

"What would you say," he asked, suddenly, "if I were to come and live in England, and become naturalized, and never go back to my native country again?"

"And give up your profession, with all its interest and excitement?"

He was silent for a minute or two; and then he said—

"I have done more than the service that is expected from every man in Prussia; and I do not think my country goes to war for many years to come. About the excitement of a campaign and the going into battle —well, there is much mistake about that. You are not always in enthusiasm; the long marches, the wet days, the waiting for months in one place—there is nothing heroic in that. And when you do come to the battle itself,—come, my dear friend, I will tell you something about that."

He seemed to wake up then. He rose from his recumbent position and took a look round the shining country that lay along the valley of the Severn.

"All the morning before the battle," said the Lieutenant, "you have great gloom; and it seems as if the day is dark overhead. But this is strange—that you

think you can see very far, and you can see all your friends in Germany, and think you could almost speak to them. You expect to go forward to meet the enemy; and you hate him that he is waiting for you upon some of the hills or behind his entrenchments. Then the hurry comes of getting on horseback; and you are very friendly to all your companions—and they are all very pleasant and laughing at this time, except one or two, who are thinking of their home. Your regiment is ordered forward: you do not know what to think: perhaps you wish the enemy would run away, or that your regiment is not needed and sometimes you have great wish of anger towards him; but all this is shifting, gloomy, uncertain, that you do not think two things one moment. Then you hear the sound of the firing, and your heart beats fast for a little while, and you think of all your friends in Germany; and this is the time that is the worst. You are angry with all the men who provoke wars in their courts and parliaments; and you think it is a shame you should be there to fight for them; and you look at the pleasant things you are leaving all behind in your own home, just as if you were never to see them any more. That is a very wretched and miserable time, but it does not last very long if you are ordered to advance; and then, my dear friend, I can assure you that you do not care one farthing for your own life—that you forget your home altogether, and you think no more of your friends; you do not even hate the enemy in front any more—it is all a stir, and life, and eagerness; and a warm, glad feeling runs all through your veins, and when the great 'hurrah' comes, and you ride forward, you think no more of yourself; you say to yourself, 'Here is for my good Fatherland!'—and then——"

A sort of sob stuck in the throat of the big Lieutenant.

"Bah," said he, with a frown, as if the bright morning and the fresh air had done him an injury, "what is the use of waiting out here, and killing ourselves with hunger?"

Bell was writing when we went into the hotel. As we entered she hastily shut up her small portfolio.

"Why not finish your letter, Mademoiselle?" he said, gently. "It will be a little time before breakfast comes in."

"I can finish it afterwards," said the girl, looking rather embarrassed.

Of course, when the Lieutenant perceived that the attention thus drawn to the letter had caused her some confusion, he immediately rushed into another subject, and said to Queen Titania, with a fine affectation of carelessness—

"You will laugh, Madame, at our having yet another adventure in a stationer's shop."

"I think," said my Lady, gravely, "that I must put a stop to these wanderings about in the early morning. I cannot quite make out why you should always get up hours before anybody else; but I find that generally some story is revealed afterwards of a young lady."

"But there is no young lady this time," said the Lieutenant, "but a very worthy man whom we found in the stationer's shop. And he has been at Sedan, and he has brought back the breech of a mitrailleuse and showed it all to us, and he has written a small book about his being in France, and did present us with a copy of it, and would not take any payment for it. Oh, he is a very remarkable and intelligent man to be found in a stationer's shop up in this curious old town on the top of a hill; but then I discovered he is a Scotchman, and do you not say here that a Scotchman is a great traveller, and is to be found everywhere? And I have looked into the little book, and I think it very sensible and good, and a true account of what he has seen."

"Then I presume he extols your countrymen?" says my Lady, with a smile.

"Madame," replies the Lieutenant, "I may assure you of this, that a man who has been in a campaign

and seen both the armies, does not think either army an army of angels and the other an army of demons. To believe one nation to have all the good, and another nation to have all the bad, that can only be believed by people who have seen none of them. I think my friend the stationer has written so much of what he saw, that he had no time for stupid imaginations about the character of two whole countries."

At this moment the introduction of breakfast broke our talk in this direction. After breakfast Bell finished her letter. She asked the Lieutenant to get it stamped and posted for her, and handed it openly to him. But, without looking at it, he must have known that it was addressed to "Arthur Ashburton, Esq., Essex Court, Temple."

"Well," said Bell, coming downstairs with her hat on, "let us go out now, and see the town. It must be a very pleasant old place. And the day is so fine;—don't you think we have had quite exceptional weather hitherto, Count von Rosen?"

Of course he said the weather had been lovely; but how was it that Bell was so sure beforehand that she would be pleased with Bridgenorth? The delight was already in her face, and beaming in her eyes. She knew the weather must be fine. She was certain we should have a delicious drive during the day, and was positive the country through which we had to pass would be charming. The observant reader will remark that a certain letter had been posted.

Really, Bridgenorth was pleasant enough on this bright morning, albeit the streets on the river-side part of the town were distinctly narrow, dirty, and smoky. First of all, however, we visited the crumbling walls of Robert de Belesme's mighty tower. Then we took the women round the high promenade over the valley. Then we went down through a curious and precipitous passage hewn out of the sandstone hill to the lower part of the town, and visited the old building in which Bishop Percy was born, the

inscription[1] on which, by the way, is a standing testimony to the playful manner in which this nation has from time immemorial dealt with its aspirates. Then we clambered up the steep streets again until we reached the great central square, with its quaint town-house and old-fashioned shops. A few minutes thereafter we were in the phaeton, and Castor and Pollux taking us into the open country again.

"Mademoiselle!" said the Lieutenant—the young man was like a mavis, with this desire of his to sing or hear singing just after his morning meal—"you have not sung to us anything for a long while now."

"But I will this morning, with great pleasure," said Bell.

"Then," said Von Rosen, "here is your guitar. When I saw you come down to go out this morning, I said to myself, 'Mademoiselle is sure to sing to-day.' So I kept out the guitar-case."

The horses pricked up their ears. The cords of the guitar twanged out a few notes. The fresh breeze blew by from the fields; and as we drove through the stillness of one or two straggling woods, Bell sang—

"If enemies oppose us,
And England is at war
With any foreign nation,
We fear not wound nor scar!
To humble them, come on, lads!
Their flags we'll soon lay low;
Clear the way, for the fray:
Though the stormy winds do blow!"

"Mademoiselle," cries the Lieutenant, "it is a challenge."

Bell laughed, and suddenly altered the key.

"Fair Hebe I left with a cautious design"—

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[1] The inscription inside the door of this old-fashioned building, which is ornamented by bars of black and white, and peaked gables, is as follows:—

"Except the Lord BVILD THE OWSE
The Labourers thereof evail nothing
Erected by R For * 1580."

this was what she sang now—

> "To escape from her charms and to drown love in wine;
> I tried it, but found, when I came to depart,
> The wine in my head, but still love in my heart."

"Well," said Tita, with an air of astonishment, "that is a pretty song for a young lady to sing!"

Bell laid down the guitar.

"And what," I ask of Queen Titania, "are the sentiments of which alone a young lady may sing? Not patriotism? Not love? Not despair? Goodness gracious! Don't you remember what old Joe Blatchers said when he brought us word that some woman in his neighbourhood had committed suicide?"

"What did he say?" asked the Lieutenant with a great curiosity.

"The wretched woman had drowned herself because her husband had died; and old Joe brought us the story with the serious remark, '*The ladies 'as their feelins, 'asn't they, sir, arter all?*' Mayn't a young lady sing of anything but the joy of decorating a church on Christmas Eve?"

"I have never been taught to perceive the humour of profanity," says my Lady, with a serene impassiveness.

"Curious, if true. Perhaps you were never taught that a white elephant isn't the same as a rainbow or a pack of cards?"

"My dear," says Tita, turning to Bell, "what is that French song that you brought over with you from Dieppe?"

Thus appealed to, Bell took up her guitar, and sang for us a very pretty song. It was not exactly French, to be sure. It began—

> "'Twas frost and thro' leet, wid a greyming o' snaw,
> When I went to see Biddy, the flow'r o' them aw;
> To meet was agreed on at Seymy' deyke nuik,
> Where I sauntered wi' mony a seegh and lang luik."

But good honest Cumbrian is quite as foreign to most of us as French; and no exception could be taken

to the sentiment of Bell's ballad, for none of us could understand six consecutive words of it.

Much-Wenlock is a quiet town. It is about as quiet as the spacious and grassy enclosure in which the magnificent ruins of its old monastery stand grey and black in the sunshine. There are many strange passages and courts in these noble ruins; and as you wander through broken arches, and over courtyards half hid in the long green grass, it is but natural that a preference for solitude should betray itself in one or other of the members of a noisy little party. We lost sight of Bell and the Lieutenant. There was a peacock strutting through the grass, and making his resplendent tail gleam in the sunshine; and they followed him, I think. When we came upon them again, Bell was seated on a bit of tumbled pillar, pulling daisies out of the sward and plaiting them; and the Lieutenant was standing by her side, talking to her in a low voice. It was no business of ours to interfere with this pastoral occupation. Doubtless he spoke in these low tones because of the great silence of the place. We left them there, and had another saunter before we returned. We were almost sorry to disturb them; for they made a pretty group, these two young folks, talking leisurely to each other under the solemn magnificence of the great grey ruins, while the sunlight that lit up the ivy on the walls, and threw black shadows under the arches of the crumbling windows, and lay warm on the long grass around them, touched Bell's cheek too, and glimmered down one side of the loose and splendid masses of her hair.

Castor and Pollux were not allowed much time for lunch; for, as the young people had determined to go to the theatre on reaching Shrewsbury, their elders, warned by a long experience, knew that the best preparation for going to a country theatre is to dine before setting out. My Lady did not anticipate much enjoyment; but Bell was positive we should be surprised.

"We have been out in the country so much—seeing so much of the sunlight and the green trees, and living at those little inns—that we ought to have a country theatre as well. Who knows but that we may have left all our London ideas of a play in London; and find ourselves quite delighted with the simple folk who are always uttering good sentiments, and quite enraged with the bad man who is wishing them ill. I think Count von Rosen was quite right——"

Of course Count von Rosen was quite right!

"—— about commonplace things only having become commonplace through our familiarity with them," continued Miss Bell; "perhaps we may find ourselves going back a bit, and being as much impressed by a country drama as any of the farmer-folk who do not see half-a-dozen plays in their life. And then, you know, what a big background we shall have!—not the walls of the little theatre, but all the great landscape we have been coming through. Round about us we shall see the Severn, and the long woods, and Broadway Hill——"

"And not forgetting Bourton Hill," says the Lieutenant. "If only they do give us a good moonlight scene like that, we shall be satisfied."

"Oh no!" said Bell gravely—she was evidently launching into one of her unconscious flights, for her eyes took no more notice of us, but were looking wistfully at the pleasant country around us—"that is asking far too much. It is easier for you to make the moonlight scene than for the manager. You have only to imagine it is there—shut your eyes a little bit, and fancy you hear the people on the stage talking in a real scene, with the real country around, and the real moonlight in the air. And then you grow to believe in the people—and you forget that they are only actors and actresses working for their salaries—and you think it is a true story, like the stories they tell up in Westmoreland of things that have happened in the villages years ago. That is one of the great pleasures of driving, is it not?—that it gives you a sense of wide

space. There is a great deal of air and sky about it; and you have a pleasant and easy way of getting through it, as if you were really sailing; whereas the railway whisks you through the long intervals, and makes your journey a succession of dots. That is an unnatural way of travelling, that staccato method of——"

Here Mademoiselle caught sight of Queen Tita gravely smiling, and immediately paused to find out what she had been saying.

"Well?" she said, expecting to be corrected or reproved, and calmly resolved to bear the worst.

But how could Tita explain? She had been amused by the manner in which the young lady had unconsciously caught up a trick of the Lieutenant's in the construction of his sentences—the use of "that" as the introductory nominative, the noun coming in afterwards. For the moment the subject dropped, in the excitement of our getting once more back to the Severn; and when Bell spoke next, it was to ask the Lieutenant whether the Wrekin—a solitary, abrupt, and conical hill on our right, which was densely wooded to the top—did not in a milder form reproduce the odd masses of rock that stud the great plain west of the Lake of Constance.

A pleasant drive through a fine stretch of open country took us into Shrewsbury; and here, having got over the bridge and up the steep thoroughfares to our hotel, dinner was immediately ordered. When at length we made our way round to the theatre it was about half-past seven, and the performance was to commence at twenty minutes to eight.

"Oh, Bell!" says my Lady, as we enter the building. She looks blankly round. From the front of the dress circle we are peering into a great hollow place, dimly lighted by ten lamps, each of one burner, that throw a sepulchral light on long rows of wooden benches, on a sad-coloured curtain and an empty orchestra. How is all the force of Bell's imagination to drive off these walls and this depressing array of carpentry, and substitute for them a stage of greensward and walls

composed of the illimitable sky? There is an odour of escaped gas, and of oranges; but when did any people ever muster up enough of gaiety to eat an orange in this gloomy hall?

7.30, by Shrewsbury clock.—An old gentleman and a boy appear in the orchestra. The former is possessed of a bass-viol; the latter proceeds to tune up a violin.

7.40—which is the time for commencing the play—three ladies come into the pit. The first is a farmer's wife, fat, ostentatious, happy in a black silk that rustles; the two others are apparently friends of hers in the town, who follow her meekly, and take their seats with a frightened air. She sits down with a proud gesture; and this causes a thin crackle of laughter and a rude remark far up in the semi-darkness overhead, so that we gather that there are probably two persons in the upper gallery.

7.45.—Two young ladies — perhaps shop-girls, but their extreme blushing gives them a countrified look —come into the pit, talk in excited whispers to each other, and sit down with an uncomfortable air of embarrassment. At this moment the orchestra startles us by dashing into a waltz from "Faust." There are now five men and a boy in this tuneful choir. One of them starts vigorously on the cornet; but invariably fails to get beyond the first few notes, so that the flute beats him hollow. Again and again the cornet strikes in at the easy parts; but directly he subsides again, and the flute has it all his own way. The music ceases. The curtain is drawn up. The play has begun.

The first act is introductory. There is a farmer, whose chief business it is to announce that "his will is law;" and he has a son addressed throughout as Weelyam, whom he wishes to marry a particular girl. The son, of course, has married another. The villain appears, and takes us into his confidence; giving us to understand that a worse villain never trod the earth. He has an interview with the farmer; but this is suddenly broken off—a whistle in some part of the

theatre is heard, and we are conveyed to an Italian lake, all shining with yellow villas and blue skies.

"That is the problem stated," said the Lieutenant; "now we shall have the solution. But do you find the walls going away yet, Mademoiselle?"

"I think it is very amusing," said Bell, with a bright look on her face. Indeed, if she had not brought in with her sufficient influence from the country to resolve the theatre into thin air, she had imbibed a vast quantity of good health and spirits there, so that she was prepared to enjoy anything.

The plot thickens. The woman-villain appears—a lady dressed in deep black, who tells us in an awful voice that she was the mistress of Weelyam in France —that being the country naturally associated in the mind of the dramatist with crimes of this character. She is in a pretty state when she learns that Weelyam is married; and events are plainly marching on to a crisis. It comes. The marriage is revealed to the farmer, who delivers a telling curse, which is apparently launched at the upper gallery, but which is really meant to confound Weelyam; then the old man falls—there is a tableau—the curtain comes down, and the band, by some odd stroke of luck, plays "Home, sweet home," as an air descriptive of Weelyam's banishment.

We become objects of curiosity, now that the adventures of the farmer's son are removed. There are twenty-one people in the pit—representing conjointly a solid guinea transferred to the treasury. One or two gay young men with canes, and their hats much on the side of their heads, have entered the dress-circle, stared for a minute or two at the stage, and retired.

They are probably familiar with rustic drama, and hold it in contempt. A good ballet, now, would be more in their way, performed by a *troupe* of young ladies whose names are curiously like English names, with imposing French and Italian terminations. A gentleman comes into the pit along with a friend, nods familiarly to the attendant, deposits his friend, utters

a few facetious remarks, and leaves: can it be that he is a reporter of a local newspaper, dowered with the privilege of free admission for "himself and one?" There must at least be three persons in the upper gallery, for a new voice is heard, calling out the graceful but not unfamiliar name of "Polly." One of the two rose-red maidens in front of us timidly looks up, and is greeted with a shout of recognition and laughter. She drops into her old position in a second, and hangs down her head; while her companion protests in an indignant way in order to comfort her. The curtain rises.

The amount of villany in this Shrewsbury drama is really getting beyond a joke. We are gradually rising in the scale of dark deeds, until the third villain, who now appears, causes the other two to be regarded as innocent lambs. This new performer of crime is a highwayman; and his very first act is to shoot Weelyam's father and rob him of his money. But lo! the French adventuress drops from the clouds: the highwayman is her husband: she tells him of her awful deeds, among them of her having murdered "her mistress the Archduchess;" and then, as she vows she will go and murder Weelyam, a tremendous conflict of everybody ensues, and a new scene being run on, we are suddenly whirled up to Balmoral Castle.

"I am beginning to be very anxious about the good people," remarked Tita. "I am afraid William will be killed."

"Unless he has as many lives as Plutarch, he can't escape," said Bell.

"As for the old farmer," observed the Lieutenant, "he survives apoplectic fits and pistol-shots very well —oh, very well indeed. He is a very good man in a play. He is sure to last to the end."

Well, we were near the end; and author, carpenter, and scene-painter had done their dead best to render the final scene impressive. It was in a cavern. Cimmerian darkness prevailed. The awful lady in black haunts the gloomy byways of the rocks, communing

with herself, and twisting her arms so that the greatest agony is made visible. But what is this hooded and trembling figure that approaches? Once in the cavern, the hood is thrown off, and the palpitating heroine comes forward for a second to the low footlights, merely that there shall be no mistake about her identity. The gloom deepens. The young and innocent wife encounters the French adventuress; the woman who did not scruple to murder her mistress the Archduchess seizes the girl by her hands—shrieks are heard—the two figures twist round one another—then a mocking shout of laughter, and Weelyam's wife is precipitated into the hideous waters of the lake! But lo! the tread of innumerable feet; from all quarters of the habitable globe stray wanderers arrive: with a shout Weelyam leaps into the lake, and when it is discovered that he has saved his wife, behold! everybody in the play is found to be around him, and with weeping and with laughter all the story is told, and the drama ends in the most triumphant and comfortable manner, in the middle of the night, in a cavern, a hundred miles from anywhere.

"No," said Queen Titania, distinctly, "I will *not* stay to see *La Champagne Ballet or the Pas de Fascination.*"

So there was nothing for it but to take the ungrateful creature back to the hotel, and give her tea and a novel. As for the billiard-room in that hotel, it is one of the best between Holborn and the Canongate. The Lieutenant begs to add, that he can recommend the beer.

## CHAPTER XV.

### "LA PATRIE EN DANGER."

"Sometimes on lonely mountain-meres,
I find a magic bark;
I leap on board: no helmsman steers
I float till all is dark."

I SIT down to write this chapter with a determination to be generous, calm, and modest in the last degree.

The man who would triumph over the wife of his bosom merely to have the pleasure of saying "I told you so," does not deserve to have his path through life sweetened by any such tender companionship. Far be it from me to recall the earnest protestations which my Lady affixed to the first portion of this narrative. Not for worlds would I inquire into her motives for being so anxious to see Arthur go. The ways of a woman ought to be intricate, occult, perplexing, if only to preserve something of the mystery of life around her, and to serve her, also, as a refuge from the coarse and rude logic of the actual world. The foolish person who, to prove himself right, would drive his wife into a corner, and demonstrate to her that she was wrong—that she had been guilty of small prevarications, of trifling bits of hypocrisy, and of the use of various arts to conceal her real belief and definite purpose—the man who would thus wound the gentle spirit by his side to secure the petty gratification of proving himself to have been something of a twopenny-halfpenny prophet—but these remarks are premature at the present moment, and I go on to narrate the events which happened on the day of our leaving Shrewsbury, and getting into the solitary region of the meres.

"I have received a telegram from Arthur," says Bell, calmly: and the pink sheet is lying on the breakfast-table before her.

"How did you get it?" says my Lady, with some surprise.

"At the post-office."

"Then you have been out?"

"Yes, we went for a short walk, after having waited for you," says Bell, looking down.

"Oh, Madame," says the Lieutenant, coming forward from the fireplace, "you must not go away from the town without seeing it well. It is handsome, and the tall poplars down by the side of the river, they are worth going to see by themselves."

"It was very pretty this morning," continued Bell, "when the wind was blowing about the light blue

smoke, and the sun was shining down on the slates and the clumps of trees. We went to a height on the other side of the river, and I have made a sketch of it——"

"Pray," says my Lady, regarding our ward severely, "when did you go out this morning?"

"Perhaps about an hour and a half ago," replies Bell carelessly; "I don't exactly know."

"More than that, I think," says the Lieutenant, "for I did smoke two cigars before we came back. It is much to our credit to get up so early, and not anything to be blamed of."

"I am glad Bell is improving in that respect," retorts my Lady, with a wicked smile; and then she adds, "Well?"

"He has started," is the reply to that question.

"And is going by another route?"

"Yes: in a dog-cart—by himself. Don't you think it is very foolish of him, Tita? You know what accidents occur with those dog-carts."

"Mademoiselle, do not alarm yourself," says the Lieutenant, folding up his newspaper. "It is quite true what Madame said yesterday, that there are so many accidents in driving, and so very seldom anyone hurt. You ask your friends—yes, they have all had accidents in their riding and driving; they have all been in great danger, but what have they suffered?—Nothing! Sometimes a man is killed—yes, one out of several millions in the year. And if he tumbles over—which is likely if he does not know much of horses and driving—what then? No, there is no fear; we shall see him some day very well, and go on all together!"

"Oh, shall we?" says my Lady, evidently regarding this as a new idea.

"Certainly. Do you think he goes that way always? Impossible. He will tire of it. He will study the roads across to meet us. He will overtake us with his light little dog-cart; we shall have his company along the road."

Tita did not at all look so well satisfied with this

prospect of meeting an old friend as she might have done.

"And when are you to hear from him next?" I inquire of Mademoiselle.

"He will either write or telegraph to each of the big towns along our route, on the chance of the message intercepting us somewhere; and so we shall know where he is."

"And he has really started?"

Bell placed the telegram in my hands. It was as follows:—

"*Have set out by Hatfield, Huntingdon, and York, for Edinburgh. Shall follow the real old coach-road to Scotland; and am certain to find much entertainment.*"

"For man and beast," struck in the Lieutenant. "And I know of a friend of mine travelling in your country who went into one of these small inns, and put up his horse, and when they brought him in his luncheon to the parlour, he only looked at it and said, '*Very good, waiter; this is very nice; but where is the entertainment for the man?*'"

I continued to read the telegram aloud—

"*Shall probably be in Edinburgh before you; but will telegraph or write to each big town along your route, that you may let me know where you are.*"

"It is very obliging," says the Lieutenant, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"It is quite certain," observes my Lady, with decision, "that he must not accompany us in his dog-cart; for we shall arrive at plenty of inns where they could not possibly put up three horses and so many people."

"It would have been so," said the Lieutenant, "at the place on the top of the hill—Bourton was it called, yes?"

The mere notion of Arthur coming in to spoil the enjoyment of that rare evening was so distressing, that we all took refuge in breakfast, after which we went for a long and leisurely stroll through Shrewsbury; and then had Castor and Pollux put into the phaeton. It

seemed now to us to matter little at what town we stayed. We had almost begun to forget the various points of the journey. It was enough that some hospitable place—whether it were city, town, or hamlet—afforded us shelter for the night, that on the next morning we could issue forth again into the sweet-smelling country air, and have all the fair green world to ourselves. We looked with a lenient eye upon the great habitations of men. What if a trifle of coal-smoke hung about the house-tops, and that the streets were not quite so clean as they might be? We suffered little from these inconveniences. They only made us rejoice the more to get out into the leafy lanes, where the air was fresh with the scent of the bean-fields and the half-dried hay. And when a town happened to be picturesque—and it was our good fortune to find a considerable number of handsome cities along our line of route—and combined with its steep streets, its old-fashioned houses, and its winding river and banks, a fair proportion of elms and poplars scattered about in clumps to mar the monotony of the grey fronts and the blue slates, we paid such a tribute of admiration as could only be obtained from people who knew they would soon be emancipated from the din and clamour, the odour and the squalor, of thoroughfares and pavements.

Bell, sitting very erect, and holding the whip and reins in the most accurate and scientific fashion, was driving us leisurely up the level and pleasant road leading from Shrewsbury to Ellesmere. The country was now more open and less hilly than that through which we had recently come. Occasionally, as in the neighbourhood of Harmer Hill, we drove by long woods; but for the most part our route lay between spacious meadows, fields, and farms, with the horizon around lying blue and dark under the distant sky. The morning had gradually become overcast, and the various greens of the landscape were darkened by the placid grey overhead. There was little wind, but a prevailing coolness that seemed to have something of premonitory moistness in it.

But how the birds sang under the silence of that cold grey sky! We seemed to hear all the sounds within a great compass, and these were exclusively the innumerable notes of various warblers—in the hedges, and in the road-side trees, far away in woods, or hidden up in the level greyness of the clouds: *Tewi, tewi, trrrr-weet! —droom, droom, phloee!—tuck, tuck, tuck, tuck, feer!*— that was the silvery chorus from thousands of throats, and, under the darkness of the grey sky, the leaves of the trees and the woods seemed to hang motionless in order to listen. Now and then Bell picked out the call of a thrush or a blackbird from the almost indistinguishable mass of melody; but it seemed to us that all the fields and hedges had but one voice, and that it was clear, and sweet, and piercing, in the strange silence reigning over the land.

So we rolled along the unfrequented road, occasionally passing a wayside tavern, a farmhouse, or a cluster of cottages, until about noon we caught a glimpse of a stretch of grey water. On this lonely mere no boat was to be seen, nor any house on its banks, merely a bit of leaden-coloured water placed amid the soft and low-lying woods. Then we caught the glimmer of another sheet of cold grey, and by-and-by, driving under and through an avenue of trees, we came full in sight of Ellesmere.

The small lake looked rather dismal just then. There was a slight stirring of wind on its surface, which destroyed the reflection of the woods along its shores, so that the water was pretty much the counterpart of the gloomy sky above. At this moment, too, the moisture in the air began to touch our faces, and everything portended a shower. Bell drove us past the mere and on to the small village, where Castor and Pollux were safely lodged in the stables of the "Bridgewater Arms."

We had got into shelter just in time. Down came the rain with a will; but we were unconcernedly having luncheon in a long apartment which the landlord had recently added on to his premises. Then we darted

across the yard to the billiard-room, where Bell and my Lady having taken up lofty positions in order to overlook the tournament, we proceeded to knock the balls about until the shower should cease.

The rain, however, showed no symptoms of leaving off, so we resolved to remain at Ellesmere that night, and the rest of the afternoon was spent in getting up arrears of correspondence and similar work. It was not until after dinner that it was found the rain-clouds had finally gathered themselves together, and then, when we went out for a stroll, in obedience to Bell's earnest prayer, the evening had drawn on apace.

The darkening waters of the lake were now surrounded by low clouds of white mist, that hung about the still and wet woods. From the surface of the mere, too, a faint vapour seemed to rise, so that the shores on the other side had grown dim and vague. The trees were still dropping large drops into the plashing road; runnels of water showed how heavy the rain had been: and it seemed as if the grey and ghostly plain of the lake were still stirred by the commotion of the showers. The reflection of a small yacht out from the shore was blurred and indistinct; and underneath the wooded island beyond there only reigned a deeper gloom on the mere.

Of course, no reasonable person could have thought of going out in a boat on this damp evening; but Bell having expressed some wish of the kind, the Lieutenant forthwith declared we should soon have a boat, however late the hour. He dragged us through a wet garden to a house set amid trees by the side of the lake. He summoned a worthy woman, and overcame her wonder and objections and remonstrances in about a couple of minutes. In a very short space of time we found ourselves in a massive and unwieldy punt, out in the middle of this grey sheet of water, with the chill darkness of night rapidly descending.

"We shall all have neuralgia, and rheumatism, and colds to-morrow," said my Lady, contentedly. "And all because of this mad girl, who thinks she can see

ghosts wherever there is a little mist. Bell, do you remember——"

Tita stopped suddenly, and grasped my arm. A white something had suddenly borne down upon us, and not for a second or two did we recognize the fact that it was merely a swan, bent on a mission of curiosity. Far away beyond the solitary animal there now became visible a faint line of white, and we knew that there the members of his tribe were awaiting his report.

The two long oars plashed in the silence, we glided onwards through the cold mists, and the woods of the opposite shore were now coming near. How long we floated thus, through the gloomy vapours of the lake, I cannot tell. We were bent on no particular mission; and somehow the extreme silence was grateful to us. But what was this new light that was seen to be stealing up behind the trees, a faint glow that began to tell upon the sky, and reveal to us the conformation of the clouds? The mists of the lake deepened, but the sky lightened, and we could see breaks in it, long stripes of a soft and pale yellow. The faint suffusion of yellow light seemed to lend a little warmth to the damp and chill atmosphere. Bell had not uttered a word. She had been watching this growing light with patient eyes, only turning at times to see how the island was becoming more distinct in the darkness. And then more and more rapidly the radiance spread up and over the south-east, the clouds got thinner and thinner, until all at once we saw the white glimmer of the disc of the moon leap into a long crevice in the dark sky. And lo! all the scene around us was changed; the mists were gradually dispersed and driven to the shores; the trees on the island became sharp, black bars against a flood of light; and on the dark bosom of the water lay a long lane of silver, intertwisting itself with millions of gleaming lines, and flashing on the ripples that went quivering back from the hull of our boat. We were floating on an enchanted lake, set far away amid these solitary woods.

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"Every day, I think," said Bell, "we come to something more beautiful in this journey."

"Mademoiselle," said the Lieutenant, suddenly, "your country it has been too much for me; I have resolved to come to live here always, and in five years, if I choose it, I shall be able to be naturalized, and consider England as my own country."

The moonlight was touching softly at this moment the outlines of Bell's face, but the rest of the face was in shadow, and we could not see what evidence of surprise was written there.

"You are not serious?" she said.

"I am."

"And you mean to give up your country because you like the scenery of another country?"

That, plainly put, was what the proposal of the Count amounted to, as he had expressed it; but even he seemed somewhat taken aback by its apparent absurdity.

"No," he said, "you must not put it all down to one reason; there are many reasons, some of them important; but at all events it is sure that if I come to live in England, I shall not be disappointed of having much pleasure in travelling."

"With you it may be different," said Bell, almost repeating what I had said the day before to the young man. "I wish we could always be travelling and meeting with such pleasant scenes as this. But this holiday is a very exceptional thing."

"So much the worse," said the Lieutenant, with the air of a man who thinks he is being hardly used by destiny.

"But tell me," broke in my Lady, as the boat lay in the path of the moonlight, almost motionless, "have you calculated the consequences of your becoming an exile?"

"An exile! There are many thousands of my countrymen in England; they do not seem to suffer much of regret because they are exiles."

"Suppose we were to go to war with Germany?"

"Madame," observed the Lieutenant, seriously, "if you regard one possibility, why not another? Should I not hesitate of living in England for fear of a comet striking your country rather than Germany? No: I do not think there is any chance of either; but if there is a war, then I consider whether I am more bound to Germany or to England. And that is a question of the ties you may form, which may be more strong than merely that you chance to have been born in a particular place."

"These are not patriotic sentiments," remarks my Lady, in a voice which shows she is pleased as well as amused by the announcement of them.

"Patriotism!" he said, "that is very good—but you need not make it a fetish. Perhaps I have more right to be patriotic in a country that I choose for my own, than in a country where I am born without any choice of my own. But I do not find my countrymen when they come to England much troubled by such things: and I do not think your countrymen, when they go to America, consult the philosophers, and say what they would do in a war. If you will allow me to differ from you, Madame, I do not think that is a great objection to my living in England."

An objection—coming from her! The honest Lieutenant meant no sarcasm; but if a blush remained in my Lady's system—which is pretty well trained, I admit, to repress such symptoms of consciousness—surely it ought to have been visible on this clear moonlight night.

At length we had to make for the shore. It seemed as though we were leaving out there on the water all the white wonder of the moon; but when we had run the boat into the boat-house and got up among the trees, there too was the strong white light, gleaming on black branches, and throwing bars of shadow across the pale brown road. We started on our way back to the village, by the margin of the mere. The mists seemed colder here than out on the water; and now we could see the moonlight struggling with a faint white haze that lay over all the surface of the lake. My Lady and Bell

walked on in front; the Lieutenant was apparently desirous to linger a little behind.

"You know," he said, in a low voice, and with a little embarrassment, "why I have resolved to live in England."

"I can guess."

"I mean to ask Mademoiselle to-morrow—if I have the chance—if she will become my wife."

"You will be a fool for your pains."

"What is that phrase? I do not comprehend it," he said.

"You will make a mistake if you do. She will refuse you."

"And well?" he said. "Does not every man run the chance of that? I will not blame her—no; but it is better I should ask her, and be assured of this one way or the other."

"You do not understand. Apart from all other considerations, Bell would almost certainly object to entertaining such a proposal after a few days' acquaintanceship——"

"A few days!" he exclaimed. "*Du Himmel!* I have known her years and years ago—very well we were acquainted——"

"But the acquaintanceship of a boy is nothing. You are almost a stranger to her now."

"See here," he urged. "We do know more of each other in this week or two than if I had seen her for many seasons of your London society. We have seen each other at all times—under all ways—not mere talking in a dance, or so forth."

"But you know she has not definitely broken off with Arthur yet."

"Then the sooner the better," said the Lieutenant, bluntly. "How is it you do all fear him, and the annoyance of his coming? Is a young lady likely to have much sympathy for him, when he is very disagreeable, and rude, and angry? Now, this is what I think about him. I am afraid Mademoiselle is very sorry to tell him to go away. They are old friends.

But she would like him to go away, for he is very jealous, and angry, and rude; and so I go to her, and say—no, I will not tell you what my argument is, but I hope I will show Mademoiselle it will be better if she will promise to be my wife, and then this pitiful fellow he will be told not to distress her any more. If she says no—it is a misfortune for me, but none to her. If she says yes, then I will look out that she is not any more annoyed—that is quite certain."

"I hope you don't wish to marry merely to rescue a distressed damsel."

"Bah," he said, "you know it is not that. But you English people, you always make your jokes about these things—not very good jokes either—and do not talk frankly about it. When Madame comes to hear of this—and if Mademoiselle is good enough not to cast me away—it will be a hard time for us, I know, from morning until night. But have I not told you what I have considered this young lady—so very generous in her nature, and not thinking of herself—so very frank and good-natured to all people around her—and of a good, light heart, that shows she can enjoy the world, and is of a happy disposition, and will be a very noble companion for the man who marries her? I would tell you much more, but I cannot in your language."

At all events, he had picked up a good many flattering adjectives. Mademoiselle's dowry in that respect was likely to be considerable.

Here we got back to the inn. Glasses were brought in, and we had a final game of bézique before retiring for the night; but the Lieutenant's manner towards Bell was singularly constrained and almost distant, and he regarded her occasionally in a somewhat timid and anxious way.

[*Note by Queen Titania.*—"It is perhaps unnecessary for me to explain that I am not responsible for the strange notions that may enter the heads of two light-hearted young people when they are away for a holiday. But I must protest against the insinuation—conveyed in a manner *which I will not describe*—that I was through-

out scheming against Arthur's suit with our Bell. That poor boy is the son of two of my oldest friends ; and for himself we have always had the greatest esteem and liking. If he caused us a little annoyance at this time, he had perhaps a sort of excuse for it—which is more than *some people* can say, when they have long ago got over the jealousies of courtship, and yet do not cease to persecute their wives with *far from good-natured* jests—and it is, I think, a little unfair to represent me as being blind to his peculiar situation, or unmerciful towards himself. On the contrary, I am sure I did everything I could to smooth over the unpleasant incidents of his visit ; but I did not find it incumbent on me to become a *partisan*, and spend hours in getting up philosophical—*philosophical !*—excuses for a rudeness which was really unpardonable. What I chiefly wish for, I know, is to see all those young folks happy and enjoying themselves ; but it would puzzle *wiser heads than mine* to find a means of reconciling them. As for Count von Rosen, if he made up his mind to ask Bell to be his wife, because Ellesmere looked pretty when the moon came out, I cannot help it. It is some years since I gave up the idea of attempting to account for the odd freaks and impulses that get into the heads of what I suppose we must call the *superior sex.*"]

## CHAPTER XVI.

### OUR UHLAN OUT-MANŒUVRED.

"Come down, come down, my bonnie bird,
And eat bread aff my hand ;
Your cage shall be of wiry goud,
Whar now it's but the wand."

"You are the most provoking husband I ever met with," says Queen Titania.

We are climbing up the steep ascent which leads from the village of Ellesmere to the site of an ancient castle. The morning is full of a breezy sunshine, and the cool north-wester stirs here and there a grey ripple on the blue waters of the lake below.

"I hope you have not had much experience in that direction," I observe.

"Very pretty. That is very nice indeed. We are improving, are we not?" she says, turning to Bell.

Bell, who has a fine colour in her face from the light breeze and the brisk walking, puts her hand affectionately within her friend's arm, and says, in gentle accents—

"It is a shame to tease you so, you poor innocent little thing. But we will have our revenge. We will ask somebody else to protect you, my pet lamb!"

"Lamb—hm! Not much of the lamb visible, but a good deal of the vinegar sauce," says one of us, mindful of past favours.

It was a deadly quarrel. I think it had arisen out of Tita's inability to discover which way the wind was blowing; but the origin of our sham-fights had seldom much to do with their subsequent rise and progress.

"I wish I had married *you*, Count von Rosen," says my Lady, turning proudly and graciously to her companion on the right.

"Don't alarm the poor man," I say: and indeed the Lieutenant looked quite aghast.

"Madame," he replied gravely, when he had recovered himself, "it is very kind of you to say so; and if you had made me the offer sooner, I should have accepted it with great pleasure. But would there have been any difference? No, I think not—perhaps it would be the worse. It is merely that you are married; and you make believe to chafe against the bonds. Now, I think you two would be very agreeable to each other if you were not married."

"Ah, well," said Tita, with an excellently constructed sigh; "I suppose we must look on marriage as a trial, and bear it with meekness and patience. We shall have our reward elsewhere."

Bell laughed, in a demure manner. That calm assumption of the virtues of meekness and patience was a little too much; but what was the use of further fighting on a morning like this? We got the key of a small gate. We climbed up a winding path through trees that were rustling in the sunlight. We emerged upon a beautiful green lawn—a bowling-green, in fact, girt in by a low hedge, and overlooked by a fancy little building. But the great charm of this elevated site was the panorama around and beyond. Windy clouds of white and grey kept rolling up out of the west, throw-

ing splashes of purple gloom on the bright landscape. The trees waved and rustled in the cool breeze—the sunlight kept chasing the shadows across the far meadows. And then down below us lay the waters of Ellesmere lake—here and there a deep, dark blue, under the warm green of the woods, and here and there being stirred into a shimmer of white by the wind that was sweeping across the sky.

"And to-day we shall be in Chester, and to-morrow in Wales!" cried Bell, looking away up to the north, where the sky was pretty well heaped up with the flying masses of cloud. She looked so bright and joyous then, that one could almost have expected her to take flight herself, and disappear like a wild bird amid the shifting lights and glooms of the windy day. The Lieutenant, indeed, seemed continually regarding her in rather an anxious and embarrassed fashion. Was he afraid she might escape? Or was he merely longing to get an opportunity of plunging into that serious business he had spoken of the night before? Bell was all unconscious. She put her hand within Tita's arm, and walked away over the green lawn, which was warm in the sunshine. We heard them talking of a picnic on this lofty and lonely spot—sketching out tents, archery-grounds, and what not, and assigning a place to the band. Then there were rumours of the "Haymakers," of "Roger de Coverley," of the "Guaracha," and I know not what other nonsense, coming towards us as the north-wester blew back to us fragments of their talk, until even the Lieutenant remarked that an old-fashioned country-dance would look very pretty up here, on such a fine piece of green, and with all the blue and breezy extent of a great English landscape forming the circular walls of this magnificent ball-room.

A proposal is an uncomfortable thing to carry about with one. Its weight is unconscionable, and on the merriest of days it will make a man down-hearted. To ask a woman to marry is about the most serious duty which a man has to perform in life, even as some

would say that it is the most unnecessary: and those who settled the relations of the sexes, before or after the Flood, should receive the gratitude of all womankind for the ingenuity with which they shifted on to male shoulders this heavy and grievous burden.

The Lieutenant walked down with us from the hill and through the little village to the inn as one distraught. He scarcely even spoke—and never to Bell. He regarded the getting out of the phaeton with a listless air. Castor and Pollux—whose affections he had stolen away from us through a whole series of sneaking kindnesses—whinnied to him in vain. When my Lady, who now assumed the responsibility of apportioning to us our seats, asked him to drive on, he obeyed mechanically.

Now our Bonny Bell, as I have said, was unconscious of the awful possibilities that hung over our adventures of that day; and was in as merry a mood as you could desire to see. She sat beside the Lieutenant; and scarcely had we gone gently along the narrow village street and out into the broader country road that leads northward, than she began to tell her companion of the manner in which Tita tyrannizes over our parish.

"You would not think it, would you?" she asked.

"No," said the Lieutenant, "I should not think she was a very ferocious lady."

"Then you don't know her," says a voice from behind; and Tita says, "Don't begin again," in an injured way, as if we were doing some sort of harm to the fine morning.

"I can assure you," said Bell, seriously, "that she rules the parish with a rod of iron. She knows every farthing that every labourer makes in the week, and he catches it if he does not bring home a fair proportion to his wife. 'Well, Jackson,' she says, 'I hear your master is going to give you fourteen shillings a week now.' 'Thank ye, ma'am,' he says, for he knows quite well who secured him the additional shilling to his wages. 'But I want you to give me threepence out of it for the savings bank; and your wife will

gather up sixpence a week until she gets enough for another pair of blankets for you, now the winter is coming on, you know.' Well, the poor man dares not object. He gives up three-fourths of the shilling he had been secretly expecting to spend on beer, and does not say a word. The husbands in our parish have a bad time of it——"

"One of them has, at least," says that voice from behind.

"And you should see how our Tita will confront a huge fellow who is half bemused with beer, and order him to be silent in her presence. 'How dare you speak to your wife like that before me!'—and he is as quiet as a lamb. And sometimes the wives have a turn of it, too—not reproof, you know, but a look of surprise if they have not finished the sewing of the children's frocks which Tita and I have cut out for them—or if they have gone into the alehouse with their husbands late on the Saturday night—or if they have missed being at church next morning. Then you should see the farmers' boys playing pitch-and-toss in the road on the Sunday forenoons—how they scurry away like rabbits when they see her coming up from church—they fly behind stacks, or plunge through hedges—anything to get out of her way."

"And I am not assisted, Count von Rosen, in any of these things," says my Lady, "by a young lady who was once known to catch a small boy and shake him by the shoulders because he threw a stone at the clergyman as he passed."

"Then you do assist, Mademoiselle," inquires the Lieutenant, "in this overseeing of the parish?"

"Oh, I merely keep the books," replied Bell. "I am the treasurer of the savings bank, and I call a fortnightly meeting to announce the purchase of the various kinds of cotton and woollen stuffs, at wholesale prices, and to hear from the subscribers what they most need. Then we have the materials cut into patterns, we pay so much to the women for sewing, and then we sell the things when they are made, so that the people pay for every-

thing they get, and yet get it far cheaper than they would at a shop, while we are not out of pocket by it."

Here a deep groan is heard from the hind seat of the phaeton. That beautiful fiction about the ways and means of our local charities has existed in our household for many a day. The scheme is admirable. There is no pauperization of the peasantry around. The theory is that Queen Tita and Bell merely come in to save the cost of distribution; and that nothing is given away gratis except their charitable labour. It is a pretty theory. The folks round about us find it answers admirably. But somehow or other—whether from an error in Bell's book-keeping, or whether from a sudden rise in the price of flannel, or some other recondite and esoteric cause—all I know is that the system demands an annual subvention from the head of the house. Of course my Lady can explain all that away. There is some temporary defect in the working out of the scheme; the self-supporting character of it remains easy of demonstration. It may be so. But a good deal of bread—in the shape of cheques—has been thrown upon the waters in a certain district in England; while the true author of the charity—the real dispenser of these good things—is not considered in the matter, and is privately regarded as a sort of grudging person, who does not understand the larger claims of humanity.

At length we have our first glimpse of Wales. From Ellesmere to Overton the road gradually ascends, until, just before you come to Overton, it skirts the edge of a high plateau, and all at once you are confronted by the sight of a great valley, through which a stream, brown as a Welsh rivulet ought to be, is slowly stealing. That narrow thread that twists through spacious woods and green meadows is the river Dee; far away beyond the valley that it waters, rise the blue masses of Cyrn-y-Brain and Cefn-y-Fedn, while to the south of the latter range lies the gap by which you enter the magic vale of Llangollen. On this breezy morning there were white clouds blowing over the dusky peaks of the mountains, while ever and anon, from a blue rift over-

THE ROAD TO WREXHAM. P. 221.

head, a shimmering line of silver would strike down, and cause the side of some distant hill to shine in pale brown, and grey, and gold.

"That is a very strange sight to me," said the Lieutenant, as the horses stood in the road; "all these great mountains, with, I think, no houses on them. That is the wild country into which the first inhabitants of this country fled when the German tribes swarmed over here—all that we have been taught at school: but only think of the difficulty the Berlin boy —living with nothing but miles of flat sand around him —has to imagine a wild region like this, which gave shelter because no one could follow into its forest and rocks. And how are we to go? We cannot drive into these mountains."

"Oh, but there are very fine roads in Wales," said Bell; "broad, smooth, well-made roads; and you can drive through the most beautiful scenery, if you wish."

However, it was arranged we should not attempt anything of the kind, which would take us too far out of our route to Scotland. It was resolved to let the horses have a rest in Chester the next day, while we should take a run down by rail to Llanrwst and Bettws-y-Coed, merely to give our Uhlan a notion of the difficulties he would have to encounter in subduing this country, when the time came for that little expedition.

So we bowled through the little village of Overton, and down the winding road which plunges into the beautiful valley we had been regarding from the height. We had not yet struck the Dee; but it seemed as though the ordinary road down in this plain was a private path through a magnificent estate. As far as we could see, a splendid avenue of elms stretched on in front of us; and while we drove through the cool shade, on either side lay a spacious extent of park, studded with grand old oaks. At length we came upon the stream, flowing brown and clear, down through picturesque and wooded banks; and then we got into open country again, and ran pleasantly up to Wrexham.

Perhaps the Lieutenant would have liked to bait the horses in some tiny village near to this beautiful stream. We should all have gone out for a saunter along the banks; and, in the pulling of wild flowers, or the taking of sketches, or some such idyllic employment, the party would in all likelihood have got divided. It would have been a pleasant opportunity for him to ask this gentle English girl to be his wife—with the sweet influences of the holiday-time disposing her to consent, and with the quiet of this wooded valley ready to catch her smallest admission. Besides, who could tell what might happen after Bell had reached Chester? That was the next of the large towns which Arthur had agreed to make points of communication. I think the Lieutenant began at this time to look upon large towns as an abomination, to curse telegraphs, and hate the penny post with a deadly hatred.

But in place of any such quiet resting-place, we had to put up Castor and Pollux in the brisk little town of Wrexham, which was even more than usually busy with its market-day. The Wynnstay Arms was full of farmers, seed-agents, implement makers, and what not, all roaring and talking to the last limit of their lungs —bustling about the place and calling for glasses of ale, or attacking huge joints of cold roast beef with an appetite which had evidently not been educated on nothing. The streets were filled with the vendors of various wares; the wives and daughters of the farmers, having come in from the country in the dog-cart or waggonette, were promenading along the pavement in the most gorgeous hues known to silken and muslin fabrics; cattle were being driven through narrow thoroughfares; and the sellers of fruit and of fish in the market-place alarming the air with their invitations. The only quiet corner, indeed, was the churchyard and the church, through which we wandered for a little while; but young folks are not so foolish as to tell secrets in a building that has an echo.

Was there no chance for our unfortunate Uhlan?

"Hurry—hurry on to Chester!" cried Bell, as we

drove away from Wrexham along the level northern road.

A gloomy silence had overtaken the Lieutenant. He was now sitting behind with my Lady, and she was doing her best to entertain him—(there never was a woman who could make herself more agreeable to persons not of her own household)—while he sat almost mute, listening respectfully, and half suffering himself to be interested.

Our pretty Bell, on the other hand, was all delight at the prospect of reaching the quaint old city that evening, and was busy with wild visions of our plunge into Wales on the morrow, while ever and anon she hummed snatches of the Lieutenant's Burgundy song.[1]

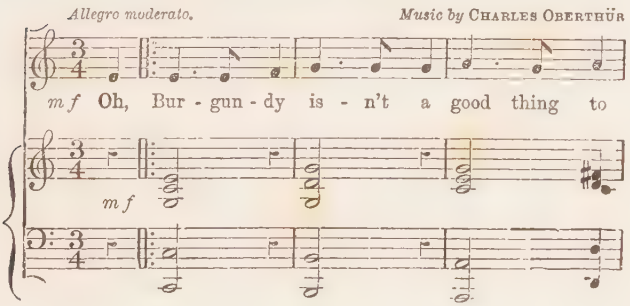
"Please may I make a confession?" she asked, at length, in a low voice.

"Why, yes."

I hoped, however, she was not going to follow the example of the Lieutenant, and confide to me that she meditated making a proposal. Although men dislike

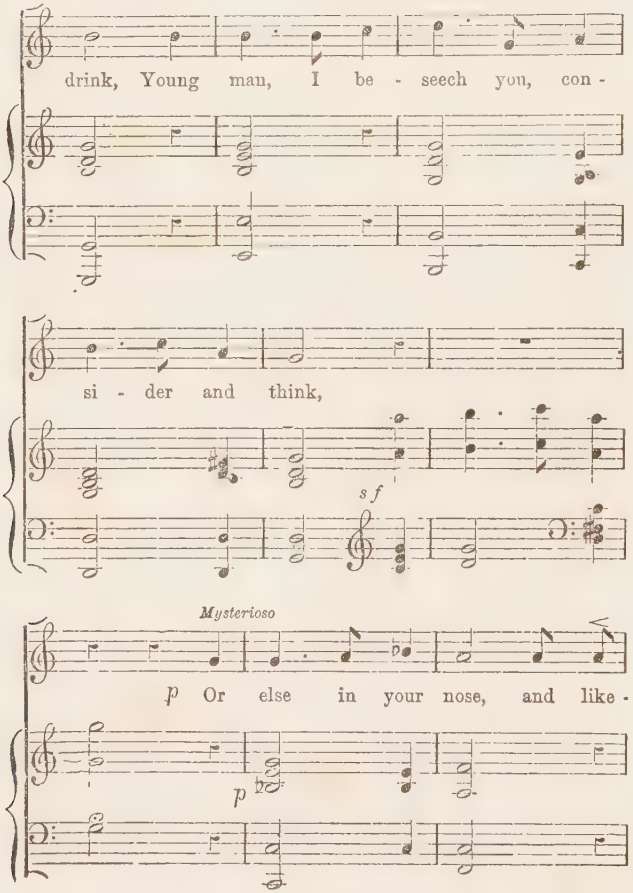
[1] Count von Rosen, fearing that his English is not first-rate, begs me to say that his very excellent friend Mr. Charles Oberthür, with whose name the public is pretty well familiar, has been good enough to set this song to music. He thinks Mr. Oberthür's music better than that which the young Englishman used to sing at Bonn, and Bell thinks so too: but then her opinion always coincides. However, I am permitted, by the joint kindness of Mr. Oberthür and the Lieutenant, to give the music here:—

"BURGUNDY ROSE."

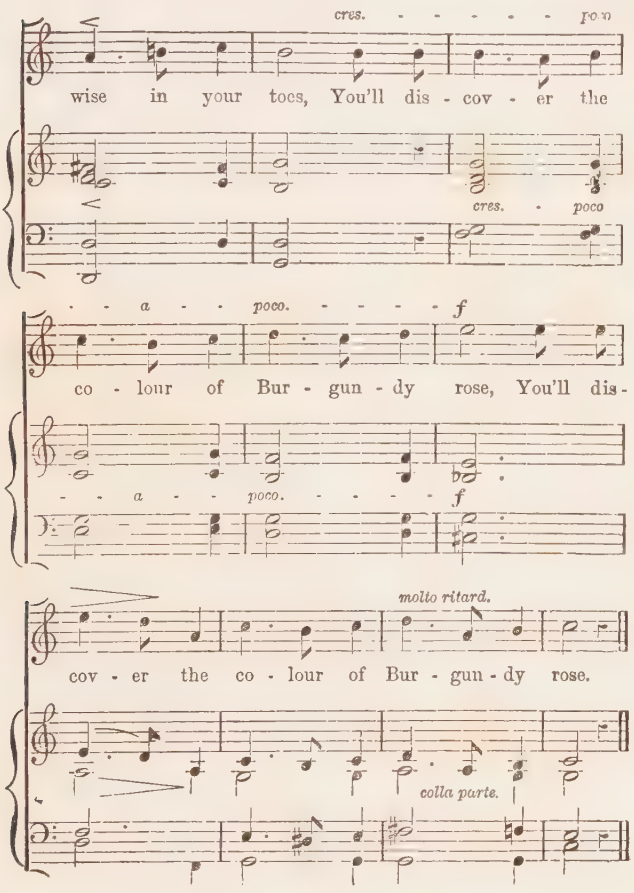


this duty, they have a prejudice against seeing it undertaken by women.

"All our journey has wanted but one thing," said Bell. "We have had everything that could be wished—bright weather, a comfortable way of travelling, much amusement, plenty of fights—indeed, there was nothing wanting but one thing, and that was the sea. Now did



you ever try to look for it? Were you never anxious to see only a long thread of grey near the sky, and be quite sure that out there the woods stopped on the edge of a line of sand? I dared not tell Tita—for she would have thought me very ungrateful, but I may tell you, for you don't seem to care about anybody's opinions—


cres. - - - - - poco
wise in your toes, You'll dis - cov - er the
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co - lour of Bur - gun - dy rose, You'll dis -
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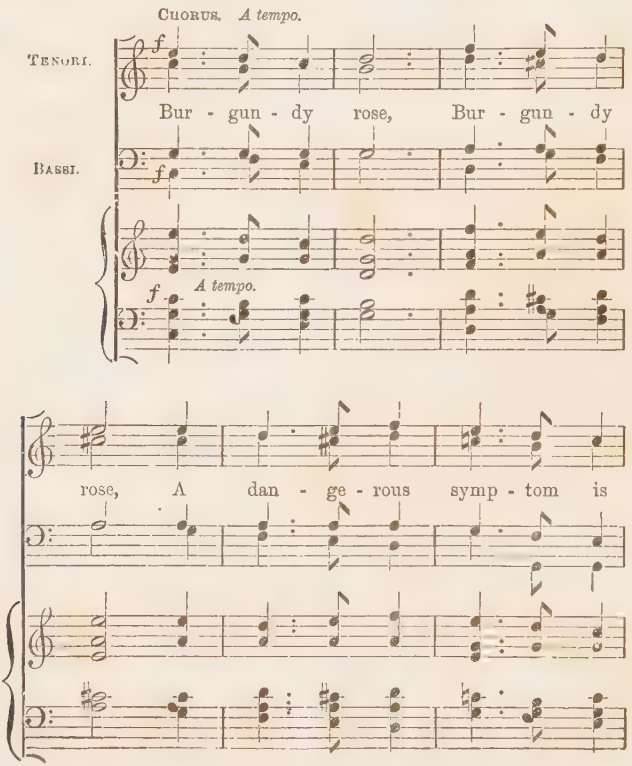
molto ritard.
cov - er the co - lour of Bur - gun - dy rose.
colla parte.

but I used to get a little vexed with the constant meadows, rivers, farms, hills, woods, and all that over and over again, and the sea not coming any nearer. Of course one had no right to complain, as I suppose it's put down in the map, and can't be altered; but we seem to have been a long time coming across the country to reach the sea."

"Why, you wild sea-gull, do you think that was our only object? A long time reaching the sea!—Don't imagine your anxiety was concealed. I saw you perpetually scanning the horizon, as if one level



line were better than any other level line at such a distance. You began it on Richmond Hill, and would have us believe the waves of the Irish Channel were breaking somewhere about Windsor."

"No—no!" pleaded Bell; "don't think me ungrateful. I think we have been most fortunate in coming as we did; and Count von Rosen must have seen every sort of English landscape—first the river-pictures about Richmond, then the wooded hills about Oxfordshire, then the plains of Berkshire, then the mere-country about Ellesmere—and now he is going into the mountains of Wales. But all the same we shall reach the sea to-morrow."

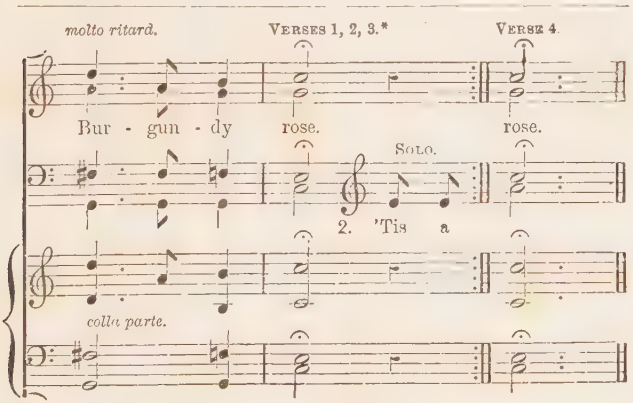
"What are you two fighting about?" says Queen Titania, interposing.

"We are not fighting," says Bell, in the meekest possible way; "we are not husband and wife."

"I wish you were," says the other, coolly.

"Madame," I observe at this point, "that is rather a dangerous jest to play with. It is now the second time you have made use of it this morning."

"And if I do repeat old jokes," says Tita, with a certain calm audacity, "it must be through the force of a continual example."




* For the last three verses see pp. 186, 187.

"——And such jests sometimes fix themselves in the mind until they develop and grow into a serious purpose."

"Does that mean that you would like to marry Bell? If it can be done legally and properly, I should not be sorry, I know. Can it be done, Count von Rosen? Shall we four go back to London with different partners? An exchange of husbands——"

Merciful Powers! what was the woman saying? She suddenly stopped, and an awful consternation fell on the whole four of us. That poor little mite of a creature had been taking no thought of her words, in her pursuit of this harmless jest; and somehow it had wandered into her brain that Bell and the Lieutenant were on the same footing as herself and I. A more embarrassing slip of the tongue could not be conceived; and for several dreadful seconds no one had the courage to speak, until Bell, wildly and incoherently—with her face and forehead glowing like a rose—asked whether there was a theatre in Chester.

"No," cries my Lady, eagerly; "don't ask us to go to the theatre to-night, Bell; let us go for a walk rather."

She positively did not know what she was saying. It was a wonder she did not propose we should go to the gardens of Cremorne, or up in a balloon. Her heart was filled with anguish and dismay over the horrible blunder she had made; and she began talking about Chester, in a series of disconnected sentences, in which the heartrending effort to appear calm and unconstrained was painfully obvious. Much as I have had to bear at the hands of that gentle little woman, I felt sorry for her then. I wondered what she and Bell would say to each other when they went off for a private confabulation at night.

By the time that we drew near Chester, however, this unfortunate incident was pretty well forgotten; and we were sufficiently tranquil to regard with interest the old city, which was now marked out in

the twilight by the yellow twinkling of the gas-lamps. People had come forth for their evening stroll round the great wall which encircles the town. Down in the level meadows by the side of the Dee, lads were still playing cricket. The twilight, indeed, was singularly clear; and when we had driven into the town, and put up the phaeton at an enormous Gothic hotel which seemed to overawe the small old-fashioned houses in its neighbourhood, we too set out for a leisurely walk round the ancient ramparts.

But here again the Lieutenant was disappointed. How could he talk privately to Bell on this public promenade? Lovers there were there, but all in solitary pairs. If Tita had only known that she and I were interfering with the happiness of our young folks, she would have thrown herself headlong into the moat rather than continue this unwilling persecution. As it was, she went peacefully along watching the purple light of the evening fall over the great landscape around the city. The ruddy glow in the windows became more and more pronounced. There were voices of boys still heard down in the racecourse, but there was no more cricketing possible. In the still evening, a hush seemed to fall over the town; and when we got round to the weir on the river, the vague white masses of water that we could scarcely see, sent the sound of their roaring and tumbling, as it were, into a hollow chamber. Then we plunged once more into the streets. The shops were lit. The quaint galleries along the first floor of the houses, which are the special architectural glory of Chester, were duskily visible in the light of the lamps. And then we escaped into the yellow glare of the great dining-room of the Gothic hotel, and sat ourselves down for a comfortable evening.

"Well," I say to the Lieutenant, as we go into the smoking-room, when the women have retired for the night, "have you asked Bell yet?"

"No," he answers, morosely.

"Then you have escaped another day?"

"It was not my intention. I will ask her—whenever I get the chance—that I am resolved upon; and if she says 'No,' why, it is my misfortune, that is all."

"I have told you she is certain to say 'No.'"

"Very well."

"But I have a proposal to make."

"So have I," says the Lieutenant, with a gloomy smile.

"To-morrow you are going down to see a bit of Wales. Why spoil the day prematurely? Put it off until the evening, and then take your refusal like a man. Don't do Wales an injustice."

"Why," says the Lieutenant, peevishly, "you think nothing is important but looking at a fine country and enjoying yourself out of doors. I do not care what happens to a lot of mountains and rivers when this thing is for me far more important. When I can speak to Mademoiselle, I will do so; and I do not care if all Wales is put under water to-morrow——"

"After your refusal, the deluge. Well, it is a good thing to be prepared. But you need not talk in an injured tone, which reminds one oddly of Arthur."

You should have seen the stare on Von Rosen's face.

"It is true. All you boys are alike when you fall in love—all unreasonable, discontented, perverse, and generally objectionable. It was all very well for you to call attention to that unhappy young man's conduct when you were in your proper senses; but now, if you go on as you are going, it will be the old story over again."

"Then you think I will persecute Mademoiselle and be insolent to her and her friends?"

"All in good time. Bell refuses you to-morrow. You are gloomy for a day. You ask yourself why she has done so. Then you come to us and beg for our interference. We tell you it is none of our business. You say we are prejudiced against you,

and accuse us of forwarding Arthur's suit. Then you begin to look on him as your successful rival. You grow so furiously jealous——"

Here the Uhlan broke into a tremendous laugh.

"My good friend, I have discovered a great secret," he cried. "Do you know who is jealous? It is you. You will oppose anyone who tries to take Mademoiselle away from you. And I—I will try—*and I will do it.*"

From the greatest despondency he had leaped to a sort of wild and crazy hope of success. He smiled to himself, walked about the room, and talked in the most buoyant and friendly manner about the prospects of the morrow. He blew clouds of cigar-smoke about as if he were Neptune getting to the surface of the sea, and blowing back the sea-foam from about his face. And then, all at once, he sat down—we were the only occupants of the room—and said, in a hesitating way—

"Look here—do you think Madame could speak a word to her—if she does say 'No'?"

"I thought it would come to that."

"You are—what do you call it?—very unsympathetic."

"Unsympathetic! No; I have a great interest in both of you. But the whole story is so old, one has got familiar with its manifestations."

"It is a very old and common thing to be born, but it is a very important thing, and it only happens to you once."

"And falling in love only happens to you once, I suppose?"

"Oh no, many times. I have very often been in love with this girl or the other girl, but never until this time serious. I never before asked anyone to marry me; and surely this is serious—that I offer for her sake to give up my country, and my friends, and my profession—everything. Surely that is serious enough."

And so it was. And I knew that if ever he got Bell to listen favourably to him, he would have

little difficulty in convincing her that he had never cared for anyone before, while she would easily assure him that she had always regarded Arthur only as a friend. For there are no lies so massive, audacious, and unblushing as those told by two young folks when they recount to each other the history of their previous love affairs.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### IN THE FAIRY GLEN.

"O Queen, thou knowest I pray not for this :
Oh set us down together in some place
Where not a voice can break our heaven of bliss,
Where nought but rocks and I can see her face
Softening beneath the marvel of thy grace,
Where not a foot our vanished steps can track,
The golden age, the golden age come back !"

Little did our Bonny Bell reck of the plot that had been laid against her peace of mind. She was as joyous as a wild sea-bird when we drew near the sea. All the morning she had hurried us on; and we were at the station some twenty minutes before the train started. Then she must needs sit on the northern side of the carriage, close in by the window; and all at once, when there flashed before us a long and level stretch of grey-green, she uttered a quick low cry of gladness, as though the last wish of her life had been realized.

Yet there was not much in this glimpse of the sea that we got as we ran slowly along the coast-line towards Conway. It was a quiet grey day, with here and there a patch of blue overhead. The sea was stirred only by a ripple. Here and there it darkened into a breezy green, but for the most part it reflected the cold grey sky overhead. The shores were flat. The tide was up, and not a rock to be seen. One or two small boats were visible; but no

great full-rigged ship, with all her white sails swelling before the wind, swept onwards to the low horizon. But it was the sea—that was enough for this mad girl of ours. She had the window put down, and a cold odour of sea-weed flew through the carriage. If there was not much blue outside, there was plenty in the deep and lambent colour of her eyes, where pure joy and delight fought strangely with the half-saddening influences produced by this first unexpected meeting with the sea.

Turning abruptly away from the coast-line—with the grey walls of Conway Castle overlooking the long sweep of the estuary—we plunged down into the mountains. The dark masses of firs up among the rocks were deepening in gloom. There was an unearthly calm on the surface of the river, as if the reflection of the boulders, and the birch-bushes, and the occasional cottages, lay waiting for the first stirring of the rain. Then, far away up the cleft of the valley, a grey mist came floating over the hills; it melted whole mountains into a soft dull grey, it blotted out dark green forests and mighty masses of rock, until a pattering against the carriage windows told us that the rain had begun.

"It is always so in Wales," said my Lady, with a sigh.

But when we got out at Bettws-y-Coed, you would not have fancied our spirits were grievously oppressed. Indeed, I often remarked that we never enjoyed ourselves so much, whether in the phaeton or out of it, as when there was abundant rain about, the desperation of the circumstances driving us into being recklessly merry. So we would not take the omnibus that was carrying up to the Swallow Falls some half-dozen of those horrid creatures, the tourists. The deadly dislike we bore to these unoffending people was remarkable. What right had they to be invading this wonderful valley? What right had they to leave Bayswater and occupy seats at the *tables d'hôte* of hotels? We saw them drive away with a secret

pleasure. We hoped they would get wet, and swear never to return to Wales. We called them tourists, in short, which has become a term of opprobrium among Englishmen; but we would have perished rather than admit for a moment that we too were tourists.

It did not rain very much. There was a strong resinous odour in the air, from the spruce, the larch, the pines, and the breckans, as we got through the wood, and ventured down the slippery paths which brought us in front of the Swallow Falls. There had been plenty of rain—and the foaming jets of water were darting among the rocks very much like the white glimmer of the marten as he cuts about the eaves of a house in the twilight. The roar of the river filled the air, and joined in chorus the rustling of the trees in the wind. We could scarcely hear ourselves speak. It was not a time for confidences. We returned to Bettws.

But the Lieutenant, driven wild by the impossibility of placing all his sorrows before Bell, eagerly assented to the proposal that we should go and see the Fairy Glen—a much more retired spot—after luncheon. The dexterity he displayed in hurrying over that meal was remarkable. It was rather a scramble—for a number of visitors were in the place; and the long table was pretty well filled up. But with a fine audacity our Uhlan constituted himself waiter for our party, and simply harried the hotel. If my Lady's eyes only happened to wander towards a particular dish, it was before her in a twinkling. The Lieutenant alarmed many a young lady there by first begging her pardon and then reaching over her shoulder to carry off some huge plate; although he presently atoned for these misdemeanours by carving a couple of fowls for the use of the whole company. He also made the acquaintance of a governess who was in charge of two tender little women of twelve and fourteen. He sat down by the governess; discovered that she had been at Bettws for some weeks; got from her some appalling statistics of the rain that had fallen; then—for

the maids were rather remiss—went and got her a bottle of ale, which he drew for her, and poured out and graciously handed to her. Bell was covertly laughing all the time: my Lady was amazed.

"Now," he said, turning in quite a matter-of-fact way to us, "when do we start for this Fairy Glen?"

"Pray don't let us take you away from such charming companionship," observed my Lady, with a smile.

"Oh, she is a very intelligent person," says the Lieutenant; "really a very intelligent person. But she makes a great mistake in preferring Schiller's plays to Lessing's for her pupils. I tried to convince her of that. She is going to the Rhine with those young ladies, later on in the year—to Königswinter. Would it not be a very nice thing for us all, when we leave the phaeton at your home, to go for a few weeks to Königswinter?"

"We cannot all flirt with a pretty governess," says Tita.

"Now that is too bad of you English ladies," retorts the Lieutenant. "You must always think, when a man talks to a girl, he wants to be in love with her. No—it is absurd. She is intelligent—a good talker—she knows very many things—and she is a stranger like myself in an hotel. Why should I not talk to her?"

"You are quite right, Count von Rosen," says Bell.

Of course he was quite right. He was always quite right! But wait a bit.

We set off for the Fairy Glen. The rain had ceased; but the broad and smooth roads were yellow with water; large drops still fell from the trees, and the air was humid and warm. The Lieutenant lit a cigar about as big as a wooden leg; and Bell insisted on us two falling rather behind, because that she liked the scent of a cigar in the open air.

We crossed the well-known Waterloo Bridge—built in the same year as that which chronicled the great battle—and we heard the Lieutenant relating to Tita how several of his relatives had been in the army which came up to help us on that day.

"You know we had won before you came up," said my Lady, stoutly.

The Lieutenant laughed.

"I am not sure about that," he said; "but you did what we could not have done—you held the whole French army by yourselves, and crippled it so that our mere appearance on the battle-field was enough."

"I think it was very mean of both of you," said Bell, "to win a battle by mere force of numbers. If you had given Napoleon a chance——"

"Mademoiselle," said Von Rosen, "the object of a campaign is to win battles—anyhow. You throw away the heroic elements of the old single combatants when it is with armies that you fight; and you take all advantages you can get. But who was the braver then—your small English army, or the big French one that lost the whole day without overwhelming their enemy, and waited until we came down to drive them back? That is a very good word—a very strong word—our *zurückgeworfen*. It is a very good thing to see that word at the end of a sentence that talks of your enemies."

At length we got to the neighbourhood of the Fairy Glen, and found ourselves in among the wet trees, with the roar of the stream reverberating through the woods. There were a great many paths in this pretty ravine. You can go close down to the water, and find still pools reflecting the silver-lichened rocks; or you can clamber along the high banks through the birch and hazel and elm, and look down on the white waterfalls beneath you that wet the ferns and bushes about with their spray. Four people need not stay together. Perhaps it was because of an extraordinary change in the aspect of the day that Tita and I lost sight of the young folks. Indeed, we had sat down upon a great smooth boulder and were pensively enjoying the sweet scents around, and the plashing of the stream, when this strange thing occurred, so that we never remembered that our companions had gone. Suddenly into the gloomy grey day there leaped a wild glow of yellow fire; and far up the

narrowing vista of the glen—where the rocks grew closer together—the sunlight smote down on the gleaming green of the underwood, until it shone and sparkled over the smooth pools. The light came nearer. There was still a sort of mist of dampness in the atmosphere—hanging about the woods, and dulling the rich colours of the glen; but as the sunlight came straggling down the rocky ravine, a dash of blue gleamed out, overhead, and a rush of wind through the dripping green branches seemed to say that the wet was being swept off the mountains and towards the sea. The Fairy Glen was now a blaze of transparent green and fine gold, with white diamonds of raindrops glittering on the ferns and moss and bushes. It grew warm, too, down in the hollow; and the sweet odours of the forest above—woodruff, and campion, and wild mint, and some decayed leaves of the great St. John's wort—all stole out into the moist air.

"Where have they gone?" says Tita, almost sharply.

"My dear," I say to her, "you were young yourself once. It's a good time ago—but still——"

"Bell never asked for letters this morning," remarked my Lady, showing the direction her thoughts were taking.

"No matter, Arthur will be meeting us directly. He is sure to come over to our route in his dog-cart."

"We must find them, and get back to Bettws-y-Coed," is the only reply which is vouchsafed me.

They were not far to seek. When we had clambered up the steep bank to the path overhead, Bell and the Lieutenant were standing in the road, silent. As soon as they saw us, they came slowly walking down. Neither spoke a word. Somehow, Bell managed to attach herself to Tita; and these two went on ahead.

"You were right," said the Lieutenant, in a low voice, very different from his ordinary light and careless fashion.

"You have asked her, then?"

"Yes."

"And she refused?"

"Yes."

"I thought she would."

"Now," he said, "I suppose I ought to go back to London."

"Why?"

"It will not be pleasant for her—my being here. It will be very embarrassing to both of us."

"Nonsense. She will regard it as a joke."

I am afraid our Uhlan looked rather savage at this moment.

"Don't you see," I observed to him seriously, "that if you go away in this manner you will give the affair a tremendous importance, and make all sorts of explanations necessary? Why not school yourself to meeting her on ordinary terms; and take it that your question was a sort of preliminary sounding, as it were, without prejudice to either?"

"Then you think I should ask her again, at some future time?" he said eagerly.

"I don't think anything of the kind."

"Then why should I remain here?"

"I hope you did not come with us merely for the purpose of proposing to Bell."

"No; that is true enough—but our relations are now all altered. I do not know what to do."

"Don't do anything: meet her as if nothing of the kind had occurred. A sensible girl like her will think more highly of you in doing that than in doing some wild and mad thing, which will only have the effect of annoying her and yourself. Did she give you any reason?"

"I do not know," said Von Rosen, disconsolately. "I am not sure what I said. Perhaps I did not explain enough. Perhaps she thought me blunt, rude, coarse, in asking her so suddenly. It was all a sort of fire for a minute or two—and then the cold water came—and that lasts."

The two women were now far ahead—surely they were walking fast that Bell might have an opportunity of confiding all her perplexities to her friend.

"I suppose," said Von Rosen, "that I suffer for my

own folly. I might have known. But for this day or two back, it has seemed so great a chance to me—of getting her to promise at least to think of it—and the prospect of having such a wife as that—it was all too much. Perhaps I have done the worst for myself by the hurry; but was it not excusable in a man to be in a hurry to ask such a girl to be his wife? And there is no harm in knowing soon that all that was impossible."

Doubtless it was comforting to him to go on talking. I wondered what Bell was saying at this moment; and whether a comparison of their respective views would throw some light on the subject. As for the Lieutenant, he seemed to regard Bell's decision as final. If he had been a little older, he might not; but having just been plunged from the pinnacle of hope into an abyss of despair, he was too stunned to think of clambering up again by degrees.

But even at this time all his thoughts were directed to the best means of making his presence as little of an embarrassment to Bell as possible.

"This evening will pass away very well," he said, "for everybody will be talking at dinner, and we need not to address each other; but to-morrow—if you think this better that I remain with you—then you will drive the phaeton, and you will give Mademoiselle the front seat—for the whole day? Is it agreed, yes?"

"Certainly. You must not think of leaving us at present. You see, if you went away we should have to send for Arthur."

A sort of flame blazed up into the face of the Lieutenant; and he said, in a rapid and vehement way—

"This thing I will say to you—if Mademoiselle will not marry me—good. It is the right of every girl to have her choice. But if you allow her to marry that pitiful fellow, it will be a shame—and you will not forgive yourself, either Madame or you, in the years afterwards—that I am quite sure of!"

"But what have we to do with Bell's choice of a husband?"

"You talked just now of sending for him to join your party."

"Why, Bell isn't bound to marry everyone who comes for a drive with us. Your own case is one in point."

"But this is quite different. This wretched fellow thinks he has an old right to her, as being an old friend, and all that stupid nonsense; and I know that she has a strange idea that she owes to him——"

The Lieutenant suddenly stopped.

"No," he said, "I will not tell you what she did tell to me this afternoon. But I think you know it all; and it will be very bad of you to make a sacrifice of her by bringing him here——"

"If you remain in the phaeton, we can't."

"Then I will remain."

"Thank you. As Tita and I have to consider ourselves just a little bit—amid all this whirl of love-making and reckless generosity—I must say we prefer your society to that of Master Arthur."

"That is a very good compliment!" says Von Rosen, with an ungracious sneer—for who ever heard of a young man of twenty-six being just to a young man of twenty-two when both wanted to marry the same young lady?

We overtook our companions. Bell and I walked on together to the hotel, and subsequently down to the station. An air of gloom seemed to hang over the heavy forests far up amid the grey rocks. The river had a mournful sound as it came rushing down between the mighty boulders. Bell scarcely uttered a word as we got into the carriage and slowly steamed away from the platform.

Whither had gone the joy of her face? She was once more approaching the sea. Under ordinary circumstances you would have seen an anticipatory light in her blue eyes, as if she already heard the long plash of the waves, and smelt the sea-weed. Now she sat in a corner of the carriage; and when at last we came in view of the most beautiful sight that we had yet met

on our journey, she sat and gazed at it with the eyes of one distraught.

That was a rare and wild picture we saw when we got back to the sea. The heavy rain-clouds had sunk down until they formed a low dense wall of purple all along the line of the western horizon, between the sea and the sky. That heavy bar of cloud was almost black; but just above it there was a calm fair stretch of lambent green, with here and there a torn shred of crimson cloud and one or two lines of sharp gold, lying parallel with the horizon. But away over in the east again were some windy masses of cloud that had caught a blush of red; and these had sent a pale reflection down on the sea—a sort of salmon-colour that seemed the complement of the still gold-green overhead.

The sunset touched faintly the low mountains about the mouth of the Dee. A rose-red glimmer struck the glass of the window at which Bell sat; and then, as the train made a slight curve in the line running by the shore, the warm light entered and lit up her face with a rich and beautiful glow. The Lieutenant, hidden in the dusk of the opposite corner, was regarding her with wistful eyes. Perhaps he thought that now, more than ever, she looked like some celestial being far out of his reach, whom he had dared to hope would forsake her strange altitudes and share his life with him. Tita, saying nothing, was also gazing out of the window, and probably pondering on the unhappy climax that seemed to put an end to her friendly hopes.

Darkness fell over the sea and the land. The great plain of water seemed to fade away into the gloom of the horizon; but here, close at hand, the pools on the shore occasionally caught the last reflection of the sky, and flashed out a gleam of yellow fire. The wild intensity of the colours was almost painful to the eyes—the dark blue-green of the shore-plants and the sea-grass; the gathering purple of the sea; the black rocks on the sand; and then that sudden bewildering flash of gold where a pool had been left among the sea-weed. The mountains in the south had now disappeared; and

were doubtless—away in that mysterious darkness—wreathing themselves in the cold night-mists that were slowly rising from the woods and the valleys of the streams.—Such was our one and only glimpse of Wales; and the day that Bell had looked forward to with such eager delight had closed in silence and despair.

When we got back to the hotel, a letter from Arthur was lying on the table.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE COLLAPSE.

"Thy crowded ports,
Where rising masts an endless prospect yield,
With labour burn, and echo to the shouts
Of hurried sailor, as he hearty waves
His last adieu, and, loosening every sheet,
Resigns the spreading vessel to the wind."

THE following correspondence has been handed to us for publication:—

"COWLEY HOUSE, TWICKENHAM,
*July* —, 1871.

"Mon cher Mamma,—Doctor Ashburton dire me que je écris a vous dans Fransais je sais Fransais un pettit et ici est un letter a vous dans Fransais mon cher Mamma le Pony est trai bien et je sui mon cher Mamma.

"Voter aimé fils,

"TOM."

"COWLEY HOUSE, TWICKENHAM,
*July* —, 1871.

"My dear Papa,—Tom as written Mamma a letter in French and Doctor Ashburton says I must Begin to learn French too but Tom says it is very dificult and it takes a long time to write a Letter with the dixonary and he says my dear Papa that we must learn German Too but please may I learn German first and you will

give my love to the German gentleman who gave us the poney he is very well my dear Papa and very fat and round and hard in the sides Harry French says if he goes on eeting like that he will burst but me and Tom only laughed at him and we rode him down to Stanes and back which is a long way and I only tumbbled off twice but once into the ditch for he wanted to eat the Grass and I Pooled at him and slipt over is head but I was not much Wet and I went to bed until Jane dryed all my close and no one new of it but her Pleese my dear papa how is Auntie Bell, and we send our love to her, and to my dear mamma and I am your affexnate son,

"JACK.

"P.S. All the monney you sent as gone away for oats and beans and hay. Pleese my dear Papa to send a good lot more."

"—— INN, OAKHAM, *Friday Afternoon.*

" . . . . You will see I have slightly departed from the route I described in a telegram to Bell. Indeed, I find myself so untrammelled in driving this light dog-cart, with a powerful little animal that never seems fatigued, that I can go anywhere without fearing there will not be accommodation for a pair of horses and a large party. I am sure you must often have been put to straits in securing rooms for so many at a small country inn. Probably you know the horse I have got—it is the cob that Major Quinet bought from Heathcote. I saw him by the merest accident when I returned from Worcester to London—told him what I meant to do—he offered me the cob with the greatest good-nature—and as I knew I should be safer with it than anything I could hire, I accepted. You will see I have come a good pace. I started on the Tuesday morning after I saw you at Worcester, and here I am at Oakham, rather over ninety miles. To-morrow I hope to be in Nottingham, about other thirty. Perhaps, if you will allow me, I may strike across country, by Huddersfield and Skipton, and pay you a visit at Kendal.

I hope Bell is well, and that you are not having much rain. I have had the most delightful weather.

"Yours sincerely,

"ARTHUR ASHBURTON."

"It is a race," said the Lieutenant, "who shall be at Carlisle first."

"Arthur will beat," remarked Bell, looking to my Lady; and although nothing could have been more innocent than that observation, it seemed rather to take Von Rosen down a bit. He turned to the window and looked out.

"I think it was very foolish of Major Quinet to lend him that beautiful little bay cob to go on such an expedition as that," said Tita. "He will ruin it entirely. Fancy going thirty miles a day without giving the poor animal a day's rest! Why should he be so anxious to overtake us? If we had particularly wanted him to accompany us, we should have asked him to do so."

"He does not propose to accompany you," I say. "He is only coming to pay you a visit."

"I know what that means," says my Lady, with a tiny shrug; "something like the arrival of a mother-in-law, with a carriageful of luggage."

"My dear," I say to her, "why should you speak scornfully of the amiable and excellent lady who is responsible for your bringing up?"

"I was not speaking of my mamma," says Tita, "but of the abstract mother-in-law."

"A man never objects to an abstract mother-in-law. Now, your mamma—although she is not to be considered as a mother-in-law——"

"My mamma never visits me but at my own request," says my Lady, with something of loftiness in her manner; "and I am sorry she makes her visits so short, for when *she* is in the house, I am treated with some show of attention and respect."

"Well," I say to her, "if a mother-in-law can do no better than encourage hypocrisy——But I bear no malice. I will take some sugar, if you please."

"And as for Arthur," continues Tita, turning to Bell, "what must I say to him?"

"Only that we shall be pleased to see him, I suppose," is the reply.

The Lieutenant stares out into the streets of Chester, as though he did not hear.

"We cannot ask him to go with us—it would look too absurd—a dog-cart trotting after us all the way."

"He might be in front," says Bell, "if the cob is so good a little animal as he says."

"I wonder how Major Quinet could have been so stupid," says Tita, with a sort of suppressed vexation.

The reader may remember that a few days ago Major Quinet was a white-souled angel of a man, to whom my Lady had given one of those formal specifications of character which she has always at hand when anyone is attacked. Well, one of the party humbly recalls that circumstance. He asks in what way Major Quinet has changed within the past two days. Tita looks up, with that sort of quick, triumphant glance which tells beforehand that she has a reply ready, and says—

"If Major Quinet has committed a fault, it is one of generosity. That is an error not common among men—especially men who have horses, and who would rather see their own wives walk through the mud to the station than let their horses get wet."

"Bell, what is good for you, when you're sat upon?"

"Patience," says Bell: and then we go out into the old and grey streets of Chester.

It was curious to notice now the demeanour of our hapless Lieutenant towards Bell. He had had a whole night to think over his position; and in the morning he seemed to have for the first time fully realized the hopelessness of his case. He spoke of it—before the women came down—in a grave, matter-of-fact way, not making any protestation of suffering, but calmly accepting it as a matter for regret. One could easily see, however, that a good deal of genuine feeling lay behind these brief words.

Then, when Bell came down he showed her a vast amount of studied respect, but spoke to her of one or two ordinary matters in a careless tone; as if to assure everybody that nothing particular had happened. The girl herself was not equal to any such effort of amiable hypocrisy. She was very timid. She agreed with him in a hurried way whenever he made the most insignificant statement, and showed herself obtrusively anxious to take his side when my Lady, for example, doubted the efficacy of carbolic soap. The Lieutenant had no great interest in carbolic soap—had never seen it, indeed, until that morning; but Bell was so anxious to be kind to him, that she defended the compound as if she had been the inventor and patentee of it.

"It is very awkward for me," said the Lieutenant, as we were strolling through the quaint thoroughfares —Bell and my Lady leading the way along the piazzas formed on the first floor of the houses; "it is very awkward for me to be always meeting her, and more especially in a room. And she seems to think that she has done me some wrong. That is not so. That is quite a mistake. It is a misfortune—that is all; and the fault is mine that I did not understand sooner. Yet I wish we were again in the phaeton. Then there is great life—motion—something to do and think about. I cannot bear this doing of nothing."

Well, if the Lieutenant's restlessness was to be appeased by hard work, he was likely to have enough of it that day; for we were shortly to take the horses and phaeton across the estuary of the Mersey, by one of the Birkenhead ferries; and anyone who has engaged in that pleasing operation knows the excitement of it. Von Rosen chafed against the placid monotony of the Chester streets. The passages under the porticoes are found to be rather narrow of a forenoon, when a crowd of women and girls have come out to look at the shops, and when the only alternative to waiting one's turn and getting along is to descend ignominiously into the thoroughfare below. Now, no stranger who comes to Chester would think of walking

along an ordinary pavement, so long as he can pace through those quaint old galleries that are built on the roofs of the ground-row of shops and cellars. The Lieutenant hung aimlessly about—just as you may see a husband lounging and staring in Regent-street while his wife is examining with a deadly interest the milliners' and jewellers' windows. Bell bought presents for the boys. My Lady purchased photographs. In fact, we conducted ourselves like the honest Briton abroad, who buys a lot of useless articles in every town he comes to, chiefly because he has nothing else to do, and may as well seize that opportunity of talking to the natives.

Then our bonny bays were put into the phaeton, and, with a great sense of freedom shining on the face of our Uhlan, we started once more for the north. Bell was sitting beside me. That had been part of the arrangement. But why was she so pensive? Why this profession of tenderness and an extreme interest and kindness? I had done her no injury.

"Bell," I say to her, "have you left all your wildness behind you—buried down at the foot of Box Hill, or calmly interred under a block of stone up on Mickleham Downs? Where be your gibes now? your gambols? your songs? your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set my Lady frowning at you as if you were an incorrigible Tom-boy? Come, now, touching that ballad of the Bailiff's Daughter—the guitar has not been out for a long time——"

A small gloved hand was gently and furtively laid on my arm. There was to be no singing.

"I think," said Bell, aloud, "that this is a very pretty piece of country to lie between two such big towns as Chester and Liverpool."

The remark was not very profound, but it was accurate, and it served its purpose of pushing away finally that suggestion about the guitar. We were now driving up the long neck of land lying between the parallel estuaries of the Dee and the Mersey. About Backford, and on by Great Sutton and Childer

Thornton to Eastham, the drive was pleasant enough —the windy day and passing clouds giving motion and variety to the undulating pasture-land and the level fields of the farms. But as we drove carelessly through the green landscape, all of a sudden we saw before us a great forest of masts—grey streaks in the midst of the horizon—and behind them a cloud of smoke arising from an immense stretch of houses. We discovered, too, the line of the Mersey; and by and by we could see its banks widening, until the boats in the bed of the stream could be vaguely made out in the distance.

"Shall we remain in Liverpool this evening?" asks Bell.

"As you please."

Bell had been more eager than any of us to hurry on our passage to the north, that we should have abundant leisure in the Lake country. But a young lady who finds herself in an embarrassing position may imagine that the best refuge she can have in the evening is the theatre.

"Pray don't," says Tita. "We shall be at Liverpool presently, and it would be a great pity to throw away a day, when we shall want all the spare time we can get when we reach Kendal."

Kendal! It was the town at which Arthur was to meet us. But of course my Lady had her way. Since Von Rosen chose to sit mute, the decision rested with her; and so the driver, being of an equable disposition, and valuing the peace of mind of the party far above the respect that ought to have been shown to Liverpool, meekly took his orders, and sent the horses on.

But it was a long way to Liverpool, despite Tita's assurances. The appearances of the landscape were deceitful. The smoke on the other side of the river seemed to indicate that the city was close at hand; but we continued to roll along the level road without apparently coming one whit nearer Birkenhead. We crossed Bromborough Pool. We went by Primrose

Hill. We drove past the grounds apparently surrounding some mansion, only to find the level road still stretching on before us. Then there were a few cottages. Houses of an unmistakably civic look began to appear. Suburban villas with gardens walled in with brick studded the roadside. Factories glimmered grey in the distance. An odour of coal-smoke was perceptible in the air; and finally, with a doleful satisfaction, we had the wheels of the phaeton rattling over a grimy street, and we knew we were in Birkenhead.

There was some excuse for the Lieutenant losing his temper—even if he had not been in rather a gloomy mood, to begin with. The arrangements for the transference of carriage horses across the Mersey are of a nebulous description. When we drove down the narrow passage to Tranmere Ferry, the only official we could secure was a hulking lout of a fellow of decidedly hang-dog aspect. Von Rosen asked him, civilly enough, if there was anyone about who could take the horses out, and superintend the placing of them and the phaeton in the ferry. There was no such person. Our friend in moleskin hinted in a surly fashion that the Lieutenant might do it for himself. But he would help, he said; and therewith he growled something about being paid for his trouble. I began to fear for the safety of that man. The river is deep just close by.

Bell and Tita had to be got out, and tickets taken for the party and for the horses and phaeton. When I returned, the Lieutenant, with rather a firm-set mouth, was himself taking the horses out, while the loafer in moleskin stood at some little distance, scowling and muttering scornful observations at the same time.

"Ha! have you got the tickets?" said our Uhlan. "That is very good. We shall do by ourselves. Can you get out the nosebags, that we shall pacify them on going across? I have told this fellow—if he comes near to the horses—if he speaks one more word to

me—he will be in the river the next moment; and that is quite sure as I am alive."

But there was no one who could keep the horses quiet like Bell. When they were taken down the little pier, she walked by their heads, and spoke to them, and stroked their noses; and then she swiftly got on board the steamer to receive them. The Lieutenant took hold of Pollux. The animal had been quiet enough, even with the steamer blowing and puffing in front of him, but when he found his hoofs striking on the board between the pier and the steamer, he threw up his head, and strove to back. The Lieutenant held on by both hands. The horse went back another step. It was a perilous moment, for there is no railing to the board which forms the gangway to those ferry-steamers, and if the animal had gone to one side or the other, he and Von Rosen would have been in the water together. But with a "Hi! hoop!" and a little touch of the whip from behind, the horse sprang forward, and was in the boat before he knew. And there was Bell at his head, talking in an endearing fashion to him as the Lieutenant pulled the strap of the nosebag up; and one horse was safe.

There was less to do with Castor; that prudent animal, with his eyes staring wildly around, feeling his way gingerly on the sounding board, but not pausing all the same. Then he too had his nosebag to comfort him; and when the steamer uttered a yell of a whistle through its steam-pipe, the two horses only started and knocked their hoofs about on the deck—for they were very well employed, and Bell was standing in front of their heads, talking to them and pacifying them.

Then we steamed slowly out into the broad estuary. A strong wind was blowing up channel, and the yellow-brown waves were splashing about with here and there a bold dash of blue on them from the gusty sky overhead. Far away down the Mersey the shipping seemed to be like a cloud along the two

shores; and out on the wide surface of the river were large vessels being tugged about, and mighty steamers coming up to the Liverpool piers. When one of these bore down upon us so closely that she seemed to overlook our little boat, the two horses forgot their corn and flung their heads about a bit; but the Lieutenant had a firm grip of them, and they were eventually quieted.

He had by this time recovered from his fit of wrath. Indeed, he laughed heartily over the matter, and said—

"I am afraid I did give that lounging fellow a great fright. He does not understand German, I suppose; but the sound of what I said to him had great effect upon him—I can assure you of that. He retreated from me hastily. It was some time before he could make out what had happened to him; and then he did not return to the phaeton."

The horses bore the landing on the other side very well; and, with but an occasional tremulous start, permitted themselves to be put-to on the quay, amid the roar and confusion of arriving and departing steamers. We were greatly helped in this matter by an amiable policeman, who will some day, I hope, become Colonel and Superintendent of the Metropolitan Force.

Werther, amid all this turmoil, was beginning to forget his sorrows. We had a busy time of it. He and Bell had been so occupied with the horses in getting them over that they had talked almost frankly to each other; and now there occurred some continuation of the excitement in the difficulties that beset us. For, after we had driven into the crowded streets, we found that the large hotels in Liverpool have no mews attached to them; and in our endeavours to secure in one place entertainment for both man and beast, some considerable portion of our time was consumed. At length we found stabling in Hatton Garden; and then we were thrown on the wide world of Liverpool to look after our own sustenance.

"Mademoiselle," said the Lieutenant—rather avoiding the direct look of her eyes, however—"if you would prefer to wait, and go to a theatre to-night——"

"Oh no, thank you," said Bell, quite hurriedly—as if she were anxious not to have her own wishes consulted; "I would much rather go on as far as we can to-day."

The Lieutenant said nothing—how could he? He was but six-and-twenty, or thereabouts, and had not yet discovered a key to the Rosamond's maze of a woman's wishes.

So we went to a restaurant fronting a dull square, and dined. We were the only guests. Perhaps it was luncheon; perhaps it was dinner—we had pretty well forgotten the difference by this time, and were satisfied if we could get something to eat, anywhere, thrice a day.

But it was only too apparent that the pleasant relations with which we had started had been seriously altered. There was a distressing politeness prevailing throughout this repast, and Bell had so far forgotten her ancient ways as to become quite timid and nervously formal in her talk. As for my Lady, she forgot to say sharp things. Indeed, she never does care for a good brisk quarrel, unless there are people present ready to enjoy the spectacle. Fighting for the mere sake of fighting is a blunder; but fighting in the presence of a circle of noble dames and knights becomes a courtly tournament. All our old amusements were departing—we were like four people met in a London drawing-room; and, of course, we had not bargained for this sort of thing on setting out. It had all arisen from Bell's excessive tenderness of heart. She had possessed herself with some wild idea that she had cruelly wronged our Lieutenant. She strove to make up for this imaginary injury by a show of courtesy and kindness that was embarrassing to the whole of us. The fact is, the girl had never been trained in the accomplishments of city life. She regarded a proposal of marriage as something of consequence. There was a defect, too, about her pulsation:

her heart—that ought to have gone regularly through the multiplication table in the course of its beating, and never changed from twice one to twelve times twelve—made frantic plunges here and there, and slurred over whole columns of figures in order to send an anxious and tender flush up to her forehead and face. A girl who was so little mistress of herself, that—on a winter's evening, when we happened to talk of the summer-time and of half-forgotten walks near Ambleside and Coniston—tears might suddenly be seen to well up in her blue eyes, was scarcely fit to take her place in a modern drawing-room. At this present moment her anxiety, and a sort of odd self-accusation, were really spoiling our holiday: but we did not bear our Bell much malice.

It was on this evening that we were destined to make our first acquaintance with the alarming method of making roads which prevails between Liverpool and Preston. It is hard to say by what process of fiendish ingenuity these petrified sweetbreads have been placed so as to occasion the greatest possible trouble to horses' hoofs, wheels, and human ears; and it is just as hard to say why such roads—although they may wear long in the neighbourhood of a city inviting constant traffic—should be continued out into country districts where a cart is met with about once in every five miles. These roads do not conduce to talking. One thinks of the unfortunate horses, and of the effect on springs and wheels. Especially in the quiet of a summer's evening, the frightful rumbling over the wedged-in stones seems strangely discordant. And yet, when one gets clear of the suburban slums and the smoke of Liverpool, a very respectable appearance of real country-life becomes visible. When you get out to Walton Nurseries and on towards Aintree Station and Maghull, the landscape looks fairly green, and the grass is of a nature to support animal life. There is nothing very striking in the scenery, it is true. Even the consciousness that away beyond the flats on the left the sea is washing over the great sandbanks on to the level shores, does not help

much; for who can pretend to hear the whispering of the far-off tide amid the monotonous rattling over these abominable Lancashire stones? We kept our teeth well shut, and went on. We crossed the small river of Alt. We whisked through Maghull village. The twilight was gathering fast as we got on to Aughton, and in the dusk —lit up by the yellow stars of the street lamps—we drove into Ormskirk. The sun had gone down red in the west: we were again assured as to the morrow.

But what would be the good of another bright morning to this melancholy Uhlan? Misfortune seemed to have marked us for its own. We drove into the yard of what was apparently the biggest inn in the place; and while the women were sent into the inn, the Lieutenant and I happened to remain a little while to look after the horses. Imagine our astonishment, therefore (after the animals had been taken out and our luggage uncarted), to find there was no accommodation for us inside the building.

"Confounded house!" growled the Lieutenant, in German; "thou hast betrayed me!"

So there was nothing for it but to leave the phaeton where it was, and issue forth in quest of a house in which to hide our heads. It was an odd place when we found it. A group of women regarded us with a frightened stare. In vain we invited them to speak. At length another woman—little less alarmed than the others, apparently—made her appearance, and signified that we might, if we chose, go into a small parlour smelling consumedly of gin and coarse tobacco. After all, we found the place was not so bad as it looked. Another chamber was prepared for us. Our luggage was brought round. Ham and beer were provided for our final meal, with some tea in a shaky teapot. There was nothing romantic in this dingy hostelry, or in this dingy little town; but were we not about to reach a more favoured country—the beautiful and enchanted land of which Bell had been dreaming so long?—

> "Kennst du es wohl? Dahin, dahin,
> Möcht' ich mit dir, O mein Geliebter, ziehn!"

[*Note by Queen Titania.*—"I confess that I cannot understand these young people. On our way from the Fairy Glen back to Bettws-y-Coed, Bell told me something of what had occurred; but I really could not get from her any *proper* reason for her having acted so. She was much distressed, of course. I forbore to press her, lest we should have a *scene*, and I would not hurt the girl's feelings for the world, for she is as dear to me as one of my own children. But she could give no explanation. If she had said that Count von Rosen had been too precipitate, I could have understood it. She said she had known him a very short time; and that she could not judge of a proposition coming so unexpectedly; and that she could not consent to his leaving his country and his profession for her sake. These are only such objections as every girl uses when she *really means* that she does not wish to marry. I asked her why. She had no objections to urge against Lieutenant von Rosen personally—as how *could* she?—for he is a most gentlemanly young man, with abilities and accomplishments considerably above the average. Perhaps, living down in the country for the greater part of the year, I am not competent to judge; but I think at least he compares *very favourably* with the gentlemen whom I am in the habit of seeing. I asked her if she meant to marry Arthur. She would not answer. She said something about his being an old friend—as if that had *anything in the world to do with it.* At first I thought that she had merely said No for the pleasure of accepting afterwards; and I knew that in that case the Lieutenant, who is a shrewd young man, and has plenty of courage, would soon *make another trial.* But I was amazed to find so much of seriousness in her decision; and yet she will not say that she means to marry Arthur. Perhaps she is waiting to have an explanation with him first. In that case, I fear Count von Rosen's chances are but very small indeed; for I know how Arthur has *wantonly* traded on Bell's *great generosity* before. Perhaps I may be mistaken; but she would not admit that her decision could be altered. I must say it is *most unfortunate.* Just as we were getting on so nicely and enjoying ourselves so much—and just as we were getting near to the Lake country that Bell so much delights in—everything is spoiled by this unhappy event, for which Bell can give no *adequate reason* whatever. It is a great pity that one who shall be nameless—but who looks pretty fairly after his own comfort—did not *absolutely forbid* Arthur to come vexing us in this way by driving over to our route. If Dr. Ashburton had had any proper control over the boy, he would have kept him to his studies in the Temple, instead of allowing him to risk the breaking of his neck by driving wildly about the country in a dog-cart."]

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE WHITE OWLS OF GARSTANG.

"As she fled fast through sun and shade,
The happy winds upon her played,
Blowing the ringlet from the braid:
She looked so lovely, as she swayed
The rein with dainty finger-tips,
A man had given all other bliss,
And all his worldly wealth for this,
To waste his whole heart in one kiss
Upon her perfect lips."

THIS state of affairs could not last.

"Look here," I say to Queen Titania, "we must cut the Lieutenant adrift."

"As you please," she remarks, with a sudden coldness coming over her manner.

"Why should we be embarrassed by the freaks of these two young creatures? All the sunshine has gone out of the party since Bell has begun to sit mute and constrained—her only wish apparently being to show a superhuman courtesy to this perplexing young Prussian."

"You very quickly throw over anyone who interferes with your own comfort," says my Lady, calmly.

"I miss my morning ballad. When one reaches a certain age, one expects to be studied and tended—except by one's wife."

"Well," says Tita, driven to desperation by this picture of Von Rosen's departure, "I warned you at our setting-out that these two would fall in love with each other and cause us a great deal of trouble."

Who can say that this little woman is wanting in courage? The audacity with which she made this statement was marvellous. She never flinched; and the brown, clear, true eyes looked as bravely unconscious as if she had been announcing her faith in

"WE MUST CUT THE LIEUTENANT ADRIFT." P. 256.

the multiplication table. There was no use in arguing the point. How could you seek to thwart or influence the firm belief that shone clearly and steadily under the soft eyelashes?

"Come," I say to her, "is Von Rosen to go; or is he to hang on in hope of altering Bell's decision? I fancy the young man would himself prefer to leave us—I don't think he is in a comfortable position."

My Lady appeared a trifle embarrassed—was there some dark secret between these two women?

"A young man," she says, with a little hesitation, "is the best judge of his own chances. I have asked Bell; and I really can't quite make her out. Still—you know—a girl sometimes is in a manner frightened into saying 'No,' the first time she is asked—and there might be——"

She stopped.

"You think the Lieutenant should ask her again?"

"No, *I* don't," says Tita, hastily; "but it is impossible to say—she had nothing to urge against Count von Rosen—only that Arthur would consider himself unjustly treated——"

"So—ho! Is that the reason?"

"No, no, no!" cries the small woman, in an agony of fright. "Don't you go and put any wrong notions into the young man's head——"

"Madam," I say to her, "recollect yourself. So far from wishing to interfere in the affairs of these two young people, I should like to bundle them both back to London, that we might continue our journey in peace. As for the Lieutenant's again proposing to marry Bell, I consider that a man who twice asks a woman to become his wife, forgets the dignity of his sex."

Tita looks up—with the most beautifully innocent smile in her eyes—and says sweetly,—

"You did yourself."

"That was different."

"Yes, I daresay."

"I knew your heart would have broken if I hadn't."

"Oh!" she says, with her eyes grown appalled.

"In fact, it was my native generosity that prompted me to ask you a second time; for I perceived that you were about to ask me."

"How many more?" she asks; but I cannot make out what mysterious things she is secretly counting up.

"But no matter. There is little use in recalling these bygone mistakes. Justice is satisfied when a fool repents him of his folly."

At this moment Bell enters the room. She goes up to Tita, and takes both her hands.

"You are laughing, in a perplexed way. You must have been quarrelling. What shall we do to him?"

"The falling out of faithful friends is generally made up with a kiss, Bell," it is remarked.

"But I am not in the quarrel," says Miss Bell, retreating to the window; and here there is a rumble of wheels outside, and the phaeton stands at the door.

"You two must get up in front," says Tita, as we go out into the white glare of Ormskirk. "I can watch you better there."

By this dexterous manœuvre Bell and the Lieutenant were again separated. The young lady was never loth to sit in front—under whatever surveillance it placed her; for she liked driving. On this cool morning—that promised a warmer day, after the wind had carried away the white fleece of cloud that stretched over the sky—she pulled on her gloves with great alacrity, and, having got into her seat, assumed the management of the reins as a matter of course.

"Gently!" I say to her, as Castor and Pollux make a plunge forward into the narrow thoroughfare. A handbarrow is jutting out from the pavement. She gives a jerk to the left rein, but it is too late; one of our wheels just touches the end of the barrow, and over it goes—not with any great crash, however.

"Go on," says the Lieutenant, from behind, with admirable coolness. "There is no harm done—and

there is no one in charge of that thing. When he comes, he will pick it up."

"Very pretty conduct," remarks my Lady, as we get out among the green fields and meadows again, "injuring some poor man's property, and quietly driving away without even offering compensation."

"It was Bell who did it," I say.

"As usual. The old story repeated from the days of Eden downward. The woman thou gavest me—of course, it is she who must bear the blame."

"Madam," I reply, "your knowledge of Scripture is astounding. Who was the first Attorney-General in the Bible?"

"Find out," says Tita; and the Lieutenant bursts into a roar of laughter, as if that were a pretty repartee.

"And where do we stop to-night?" says our North-country Maid, looking away along the green valley which is watered by the pretty Eller Brook.

"Garstang, on the river of Wyre."

"And to-morrow we shall really be in Westmoreland?"

"To-morrow we shall really be in Westmoreland. Wo-ho! my beauties! Why, Bell, if you try to leap across Lancashire at a bound like that, you'll have us in a canal, or transfixed on a telegraph-post."

"I did not intend it," says Bell, "but they are as anxious as I am to get north, and they break into a gallop on no provocation whatever."

Indeed, the whole nature of this mad girl seemed to have a sort of resemblance to a magnetic needle—it was continuously turning to the North Pole, and that in a tremulous, undecided fashion, as if, with all her longing, she did not quite like to let people know. But at this moment she forgot that we were listening. It was really herself she was delighting with her talk about deep valleys, and brown streams, and the scent of peat-smoke in the air of an evening. All the time she was looking away up to the horizon, to see whether she could not make out some lines of blue mountains, until Tita suddenly said—

"My dear!"

"Meaning me, ma'am?"

"No, I mean Bell. Pray keep a firmer hand on the horses—if a train were to come sharply by at present—and you see the road runs parallel with the railway-line for an immense distance."

"And so should we," says Bell lightly. "There is no danger. The poor animals wouldn't do anything wicked at such a time, just when they are getting near to a long rest."

Under Bell's guidance we do not lose much time by the way. The road leaves the neighbourhood of the railway. We drive past the great park of Rufford Hall. The wind blows across to us from the Irish Sea; and at the small village of Much Hoole, where the Lieutenant insists on giving the horses a little meal and water as a sort of soothing draught, we come in sight of the long red line of the Ribble, widening out into a sandy channel as it nears the ocean. Bell catches a glimpse of the smoke of a steamer; and the vague knowledge that the plain of salt water is not far away seems to refresh us all, as we plunge once more into the green and wooded country, by Longton, Hutton, and Howick.

"What is the greatest wish of your life, Bell?" I ask, knowing that she is dreaming of living somewhere along the coast of these islands.

"To see Mamma pleased," says Bell, quite prettily, just as if she were before a schoolmistress.

"You ask for the impossible. Tita's dream of earthly bliss is to have the cross in our little church turned to a crucifix; and it will never be realized. I think she would rather have that than be made a Duchess."

"I do miss that dear little church," says Tita, taking no heed of the charge preferred against her. "There is no feeling of homeliness about the churches we go into up here. You know that you are a stranger, and all the people are strangers, and you are not accustomed to the clergyman's voice."

"The fact is," I tell her, "you lose the sense of proprietorship which pleases you down at home. There,

the church is your own. You set out on a quiet Sunday morning—you know all the people coming through the fields and along the roads—and you have an eye on them, to mark the absentees. There is a family gathering in the churchyard, and a universal shaking of hands —you are pleased that all the people are coming to your church. You go in—the evergreens everywhere about you put there yourself. The tall white lilies on the altar you presented to the Vicar ; though I paid for them. Bell sits down to the organ—probably thinking that her new boots may slip on one of the pedals and produce a discord in the bass—and you know that your family is providing the music too. The Vicar and his wife dined with you the night before—you are in secret league with them. You know all the people—Lord ——'s butler, who is the most venerable person in the place—that squint-eyed publican, who thrashes his wife on the Saturday so that she can't come on the Sunday—all the other various pensioners you have, who you vainly think are being taught to be independent and economical—and a lot of small boys in knickerbockers and shiny heads of hair, and pretty young ladies with sailors' hats, blue ribbons, white jackets, and big wistful eyes. You are the presiding genius of the place ; and when Bell begins the music—and the sunlight comes through the small and yellow windows in the southern aisle—and when you see the light shining on the mural tablets, with the coloured coats-of-arms above—you ask yourself what other place could produce this feeling of homely satisfaction, and what fashionable London church, with all its money, could manufacture these ancient blocks of marble—until you think you could spend all your own money, and all your husband's too, in making the small building a sort of ecclesiastical museum."

"I hope," says Tita, with great severity, "I do not go into church with any such thoughts. It is an auctioneer's view of a morning service."

"It is the business of an auctioneer, my dear creature, to estimate the actual value of articles. But I forgot

one thing. After you have contemplated the church with profound satisfaction—just as if those old knights and baronets had died in order to adorn the walls for you—your eye wanders up to the altar. It is a pretty altar-cloth—goodness knows how much time you and Bell spent over it. The flowers on the altar are also beautiful—or ought to be, considering the price that Benson charges for them. But that plain gilt cross, with the three jewels in it—that is rather a blot, is it not?"

"Why don't you go to the zinc chapel?" says Tita, with some contempt.

"I would if I dared."

"Who prevents you? I am sure it is not I. I would much rather you went there, than come to church, merely to calculate the cost of every bit of fern or yew that is placed on the walls, and to complain of the introduction into the sermon of doctrines which you can't understand."

"May I go to chapel, please?"

"Certainly. But you are a good deal fonder of going up to Mickleham Downs than to either church or chapel."

"Will you come to chapel, Bell?"

"I am not going to interfere," says Bell, with philosophical indifference, and paying much more attention to her horses.

"I should be sorry to go," I observe, calmly, "for I had half resolved to ask Mr. Lestrange to let me put in yellow glass in those two windows that are at present white."

"Oh, will you really?" cries Queen Tita, in a piteously eager tone, and quite forgetting all her war of words.

Well, I promise, somewhat sadly. It is not the cost of it that is the matter. But on those Sunday mornings when the sunlight is flooding the church with a solemn glow of yellow, it is something to turn to the two white windows, and there, through the diamond panes, you can see the sunlight shimmering on the breezy branches

of an ash-tree. This little glimpse of the bright and glowing world outside—when our Vicar, who, it must be confessed, is not always in a happy mood, happens to be rather drowsy and even depressing in the monotony of his commonplaceness—but perhaps it will be better to say nothing more on this point.

Why the people of the flourishing town of Preston do not bridge the Ribble in a line running parallel with their chief thoroughfare and the road leading up from Harwich, is inexplicable. A pleasure party need not mind, for the drive is pleasant enough; but business folks might be tempted to use bad language over such an unnecessary injury. The road makes a long double along the two banks of the river, the most westerly bridge forming the end of the loop. First you drive down the left bank of the stream, over fine green meadows, then you cross the bridge, and drive back along the right bank, between avenues of young trees. Perhaps the notion is to give you as much as possible of the green and pleasant surroundings of Preston, before letting you plunge into the streets of the town.

Now, I do not know how it was that from the moment of our entering Preston a vague feeling of satisfaction and hope seemed to get possession of our small party. We had started in the morning under somewhat embarrassing and awkward conditions, not likely to provoke high spirits; but now we seemed to have a nebulous impression that the end of our troubles had come. Was it because we had reached the last of the large manufacturing towns on our journey, and that we should meet with no more of them? Or was it because of that promise to Queen Titania?—for that kindly little woman, when she is pleased, has a wonderful power of conveying her gladness to others, and has been known to sweeten a heavy dinner-party as a bunch of woodruff will sweeten a lumber-room. Or was it that we knew, in approaching Kendal, we should probably come to a final settlement of all our difficulties, and have thereafter peace?

As we were walking, after luncheon, through the

spacious public gardens that overlook the Ribble, the Lieutenant drew me aside, and said—

"My good friend, here is a favour I will ask of you. We come to-night to Garstang, yes?"

"Yes, we shall reach Garstang to-night."

"A town or a village?"

"I don't know. Probably a village."

"I did hope it was not a town. Well, this is what I ask. You will endeavour to take away Madame for a few moments—if we are out walking, you know—and you will let me say a few words to Mademoiselle by herself."

"I thought all your anxiety was to avoid her."

"There is something I must say to her."

"All right; I will do what you ask, on condition you do not persecute her. When she wishes to rejoin us, you must not prevent her."

"Persecute her? Then you do think I will quarrel with her—and make her very miserable—merely because she will not marry me? You think it will be as it was at Worcester—when that stupid boy from Twickenham did go along the river? Well, all I ask you is to look at these two days. Has there been any quarrel between us? No, it is quite the opposite."

"Then let it remain that way, my dear fellow. One Arthur is bad enough for a girl to manage; but two would probably send her into a convent for life."

And the truth was as the Lieutenant had described it. They had been during these two days more than polite to each other. Somehow, Bell was never done in paying him furtive little attentions, although she spoke to him rarely. That morning she had somewhere got a few wild-flowers; and three tiny bouquets were placed on the breakfast-table. The Lieutenant dared not think that one of them was for him. He apologized to Mademoiselle for taking her seat. Bell said he had not—the bouquet was for him if he cared to have it, she added with a little diffidence. The Lieutenant positively blushed—said nothing—and altogether neglected his own breakfast in offering her things she did not want. The bouquets given to Tita and her husband were

pinned into prominent positions; but no human eye saw anything more of the wild blossoms that Bell had given to Von Rosen. Betting on a certainty is considered dishonourable; and so I will not say what odds I would give that these precious flowers were transferred to a book, and that at this moment they could be produced if a certain young man were only willing to reveal their whereabouts.

Everything seemed to favour us on this fine afternoon as we drove away northward again. The road grew excellent, and we knew that we had finally left behind us that deafening causeway that had dinned our ears for days past. Then the cool breeze of the forenoon and mid-day had died down, and a still, warm sunset began to break over the western country, between us and the sea. We could not, of course, get any glimpse of the great plain of water beyond the land; but we knew that this great fire of crimson and yellow was shining down on it too, and on the long curves of the shore.

The western sands could not be much more level than the road that runs up by Broughton and Brock-bridge, but it takes one through a sufficiently pleasant country, which is watered by a multitude of brooks and small rivers. It is a rich and well-cultivated country, too; and the far-stretching meadows and copses and fields seemed to grow darker in their green under that smoke of dusky crimson that had filled the sky. It is true, we were still in Lancashire, and there was still present to us a double line of communication with the manufacturing towns we had now left behind. At certain places the road would run by the side of a railway-line, and then again we would find a canal winding itself like a snake through the grassy meadows. But a sunset is a wonderful smoother-down of these artificial features in a landscape; and when the earth-banks of the railway-line burned crimson under the darkening sky, or when an arm of the canal caught a flush of flame on its glassy surface, the picture was rather helped than otherwise, and we bore the engineers of this favoured land no deadly grudge.

A sunset, by the way, was always favourable to Bell's appearance. It lent to those fine and wavy masses of hair a sort of glory; and the splendid aureole was about all of his sweetheart that the Lieutenant could see, as he sat in the hind seat of the phaeton. Bell wears her hair rather loose when she is out in the country, and greatly likes, indeed, to toss it about as if she were a young lion; so that you may fancy how the warm light of the sunset glowed here and there on those light and silken heaps of golden-brown as we drove along in the quiet evening. Sometimes, indeed, he may have caught the outline of her face as she turned to look over the far landscape; and then, I know, the delicate oval was tinted by the generous colour of the western skies, so that not alone in the miracle of her hair did she look like some transfigured saint.

Her talk on this evening, however, was far from saintly. It was as worldly as it well could be; for she was confessing to the agony she used to suffer after going home from dinner-parties, balls, and other godless diversions of a like nature.

"I used to dread going up to my room," she said, "for I could get no rest until I had sat down and gone over everything that I had said during the evening. And then all the consequences of my imprudence came rushing down on me until I felt I was scarcely fit to live. What you had been led into saying as a mere piece of merriment now looked terribly like impertinence. Many a time I wrote down on a piece of paper certain things that I resolved to go the next day and make an apology for to the old ladies whom I am sure I had offended. But the next morning, things began to look a little better. A little reassurance came with the briskness of the day; and I used to convince myself that nobody would remember the heedless sayings that had been provoked by the general light talk and merriment. I absolved myself for that day; and promised, and vowed, and made the most desperate resolutions never, never to be thoughtless in the future, but always to watch every word I had to say."

"And in the evening," continued my Lady, "you went out to another dance, and enjoyed yourself the same, and said as many wild things as usual, and went home again to do penance. It is quite natural, Bell. Most girls go through that terrible half-hour of reaction, until they grow to be women——"

"And then," it is remarked, "they have never anything to be sorry about; for they are always circumspect, self-possessed, and sure about what they mean to say. They never have to spend a dreadful half-hour in trying to recollect mistakes and follies."

"As for gentlemen," remarked Titania sweetly, "I have heard that their evil half-hour is during the process of dressing, when they endeavour to recall the speech they made at the public dinner of the night before, and wonder how they could have been so stupid as to order a lot of champagne to oblige a friend just gone into that business, and are not very sure how many people they invited to dinner on the following Friday. Count von Rosen——"

"Yes, Madame."

"When you observe a husband whistling while his wife is talking, what do you think?"

"That she is saying something he would rather not hear," replies the Lieutenant, gravely.

"And is not that a confession that what she says is true?"

"Yes, Madame," says the Lieutenant, boldly.

"My dear," I say to her, "your brain has been turned by the last sporting novel you have read. You are a victim of cerebral inflammation. When you pride yourself on your researches into the ways and habits of the sex which you affect to despise, don't take that sort of farthing-candle to guide you. As for myself, our young friend from Prussia would scarcely credit the time I spend in helping you to nail up brackens and larch and ivy in that wretched little church; and if he knew the trouble I have to keep Bell's accounts straight —when she is reckoning up what the process of producing paupers in our neighbourhood costs us—why,

he would look upon you as an unprincipled calumniator."

"Mamma herself is scarcely so big as those two words put together," says Bell; but Mamma is laughing all this time, quite pleased to see that she has raised a storm in a tea-cup by her ungracious and unwarranted assault.

In the last red rays of the sun we have got on to a small elevation. Before us, the road dips down and crosses the canal; then it makes a twist again and crosses the Wyre; and up in that corner are the scattered gables of Garstang. As we pass over the river it is running cold and dark between its green banks; and the sunset is finally drawing down to the west as we drive into the silent village, and up to the doorstep of the Royal Oak.

'Tis a quaint and ancient hostelry. For aught we know, the Earl of Derby's soldiers may have walked over hither for a draught of beer when they were garrisoning Greenhalgh Castle over there; and when the brave Countess, away down at Latham, was herself fixing up the royal standard on the tower of the castle as Mr. Leslie's picture shows us—and bidding defiance to the Parliamentary troops. When you tell that story to Queen Titania, you can see her gentle face grow pale with pride and admiration; for did not the gallant Countess send out word to Fairfax that she would defend the place until she lost her honour or her life, for that she had not forgotten what she owed to the Church of England, to her prince, and to her lord? My Lady looks as if she, too, could have sent that message; only that she would have stopped at the Church of England and gone no further.

When we come out again, the sunset has gone, and a wonderful pale green twilight lies over the land. We go forth from the old-fashioned streets, and find ourselves by the banks of the clear running river. A pale metallic light shines along its surface; and as we walk along between the meadows and the picturesque banks —where there is an abundance of the mighty burdock-

leaves that are beloved of painters—an occasional splash is heard, whether of a rat or a trout no one can say. Somehow the Lieutenant has drawn Bell away from us. In the clear twilight we can see their figures sharp and black on the dark green slope beside the stream. Queen Tita looks rather wistfully at them; and is, perhaps, thinking of days long gone by when she, too, knew the value of silence on a beautiful evening, by the side of a river.

"I hope it is not wrong," says my Lady, in a low voice, "but I confess I should like to see the Lieutenant marry our Bell."

"Wrong? No. It is only the absent who are in the wrong—Arthur, for example, who is perhaps at Kendal, at this moment, waiting for us."

"We cannot all be satisfied in this world," remarks Tita, profoundly; "and as one of these two alone can marry Bell, I do hope it may be the Lieutenant, in spite of what she says. I think it would be very pleasant for all of us. What nice neighbours they would be for us; for I know Bell would prefer to live down near us in Surrey, and the Lieutenant can have no particular preference for any place in England."

"A nice holiday-time we should have of it, with these two idle creatures living close by and making continual proposals to go away somewhere."

"Bell would not be idle."

"She must give up her painting if she marries."

"She won't give it up altogether, I hope; and then there is her music, even if she had no household duties to occupy her time: and I know she will make an active and thrifty housewife. Indeed, the only idler will be the Lieutenant, and he can become a Captain of Volunteers."

And yet she says she never lays plans!—that she has no wish to interfere between Arthur and Von Rosen!—that she would rather see Bell relieved from the persecutions of both of them! She had already mapped out the whole affair; and her content was

so great that a beautiful gladness and softness lay in her eyes, and she began to prattle about the two boys at school, and all she meant to take home to them; and, indeed, if she had been at home, she would have gone to the piano and sung to herself some low and gentle melody, as soft and as musical as the crooning of a wood-pigeon hid away among trees.

Then she said, "How odd that Bell should have begun to talk about these unfortunate slips of the tongue that haunt you afterwards. All these two days I haven't been able to get rid of the remembrance of that terrible mistake I made in speaking of Count von Rosen and Bell as already married. But who knows? there may be a Providence in such things."

"The Providence that lies in blunders of speech must be rather erratic; but it is no wonder you spoke by mischance of Bell's marrying the Lieutenant, for you think of nothing else."

"But don't you think it would be a very good thing?"

"What I think of it is a different matter. What will Arthur think of it?"

"The whole world can't be expected to move round merely to please Arthur," says my Lady, with some asperity. "The fact is, those young men are so foolish that they never reflect that a girl can't marry two of them. They are always falling in love with a girl who has a suitor already, and then she is put to the annoyance of refusing one of them, and that one considers her a monster."

"Well, if anyone is open to that charge in the present case, it certainly is not Arthur."

My Lady did not answer. She was regarding with a tender glance those two young folks strolling through the meadows before us. What were they saying to each other? Would Bell relent? The time was propitious—in the quiet of this pale, clear evening, with a star or two beginning to twinkle, and the moon about to creep up from behind the eastern woods. It was a time for lovers to make confessions, and give

tender pledges. None of us seemed to think of that wretched youth who was blindly driving through England in a dog-cart, and torturing himself in the horrible solitude of inns. Unhappy Arthur!

For mere courtesy's sake, these two drew near to us again. We looked at them. Bell turned her face away, and stooped to pick up the white blossom of a campion that lay like a great glow-worm among the dark herbage. The Lieutenant seemed a little more confident, and he was anxious to be very courteous and friendly towards Tita. That lady was quite demure, and suggested that we might return to the village.

We clambered up a steep place that led from the hollow of the river to a higher plain, and here we found ourselves by the side of the canal. It looked like another river. There were grassy borders to it and by the side of the path a deep wood descending to the fields beyond. The moon had now arisen, and, on the clear, still water, there were some ripples of gold. Far away, on the other side, the barns and haystacks of a farm-house were visible in the pale glow of the sky.

"What is that?" said Tita, hurriedly, as a large white object sailed silently through the faint moonlight and swept into the wood.

Only an owl. But the sound of her voice had disturbed several of the great birds in the trees, and across the space between the wood and the distant farm-house they fled noiselessly, with a brief reflection of their broad wings falling on the still waters as they passed. We remained there an unconscionable time—leaning on the stone parapet of the bridge, and watching the pale line of the canal, the ripples of the moonlight, the dark wood, and the great and dusky birds that floated about like ghosts in the perfect stillness. When we returned to Garstang, the broad square in the centre of the place was glimmering grey in the moonlight, and black shadows had fallen along one side of the street.

"My dear friend," said Von Rosen, in an excited and urgent way, as soon as our two companions had gone upstairs to prepare for supper, "I have great news to tell you."

"Bell has accepted you, I suppose," said I—the boy talking as if that were a remarkable phenomenon in the world's history.

"Oh no, nothing so good as that—nothing not near so good as that—but something very good indeed. It is not all finally disposed of—there is at least a little chance—one must wait—but is not this a very great hope?"

"And is that all you obtained by your hour's persuasion?"

"Pfui! You do talk as if it did not matter to a young girl whether she marries one man or marries another."

"I don't think it much matters really."

"Then this is what I tell you——"

But here some light footsteps were heard on the stairs, and the Lieutenant suddenly ceased, and rushed to open the door.

Bell was as rosy as a rose set amid green leaves when she entered, followed by Tita.

"We are very late," said the girl, as if she were rather afraid to hazard that startling and profound observation.

"Madame," said the Lieutenant, "I give you my word this is the best ale we have drunk since we started; it is clear, bright, very bitter, brisk; it is worth a long journey to drink such ale, and I hope your husband, when he writes of our journey, will give our landlady great credit for this very good beer."

I do so willingly; but lest any ingenuous traveller should find the ale of the Royal Oak not quite fulfil the expectations raised by this panegyric, I must remind him that it was pronounced after the Lieutenant had been walking for an hour along the banks of the Wyre, on a beautiful evening, in the company of a very pretty young lady.

We had abolished bézique by this time. It had become too much of a farce. Playing four-handed bézique with partners is a clumsy contrivance; and when we had endeavoured to play it independently, the audacity of the Lieutenant in sacrificing the game to Bell's interests had got beyond a joke. So we had fallen back on whist; and as we made those two ardent young noodles partners, they did their best. It wasn't very good, to tell the truth. The Lieutenant was as bad a whist-player as ever perplexed a partner; but Bell could play a weak suit as well as another. My Lady was rather pleased to find that the Lieutenant was not a skilful card-player. She was deeply interested in the qualities of the young man whom she regarded in a premature fashion as Bell's future husband. In fact, if she had only known how, she would have examined the young fellows who came about the house—Bell has had a pretty fair show of suitors in her time—as to the condition of the inner side of the thumb. It is a bad sign when that portion of the hand gets rather horny. A man might as well go about with a piece of chalk, marked "Thurston and Co.," in his waistcoat-pocket. But the Lieutenant scarcely knew the difference between a cue and a pump-handle.

We played late. The people of the inn, yielding to our entreaties, had long ago gone to bed. When, at length, my Lady and Bell also retired, the Lieutenant rose from the table, stretched himself up his full length, and said—

"My good friend, I have much of a favour to ask from you. I will repay you for it many times again—I will sit up with you and smoke all night as often as you please, which I think is your great notion of enjoyment. But now, I have a great many things to tell you—and the room is close—let us go away for a walk."

It was only the strong nervous excitement of the young man that was longing for this outburst into the freedom of the cool air. He would have liked, then,

to have started off at a rate of five miles an hour, and walked himself dead with fatigue. He was so anxious about it that at last we took a candle to the front door, got the bolts undone, and then, leaving the candle and the matches where we knew we should find them, we went out into the night.

By this time the moon had got well down into the south-west; but there was still sufficient light to show us the cottages, the roads, and the trees. The night air was fresh and cool. As we started off on our vague ramble, a cock crew, and the sound seemed to startle the deep sleep of the landscape. We crossed over the canal-bridge, and plunged boldly out into the still country, whither we knew not.

Then he told me all the story; beginning with the half-forgotten legend of Fräulein Fallersleben. I had had no idea that this practical and hard-headed young Uhlan had been so deeply struck on either occasion; but now at times there seemed to be a wild cry of ignorance in his confessions, as if he knew not what had happened to him, and what great mystery of life he was battling with. He described it as resembling somehow the unutterable sadness caused by the sudden coming of the Spring—when, amid all the glory and wonder and delight of this new thing, a vague unrest and longing takes possession of the heart and will not be satisfied. All his life had been changed since his coming to England—turned in another direction, and made to depend for any value that might be left in it on a single chance. When he spoke of Bell perhaps marrying him, all the wild and beautiful possibilities of the future seemed to stretch out before him, until he was fairly at a loss for words. When he spoke of her finally going away from him, it was as of something he could not quite understand. It would alter all his life—how, he did not know; and the new and wonderful consciousness that by such a circumstance the world would grow all different to him seemed to him a mystery beyond explication. He only knew that this strange thing had occurred; that

it had brought home to him once more the old puzzles about life that had made him wonder as a boy; that he was drifting on to an irrevocable fate, now that the final decision was near.

He talked rapidly, earnestly, heeding little the blunders and repetitions into which he constantly fell: and not all the vesuvians in the world could have kept his cigar alight. He did not walk very fast; but he cut at the weeds and at the hedges with his stick, and doubtless startled with his blows many a sparrow and wren sleeping peacefully among the leaves. I cannot tell you a tithe of what he said. The story seemed as inexhaustible as the nebulous mystery that he was obviously trying to resolve as it hung around him in impalpable folds. When he came to the actual question whether Bell had given him to understand that she might reconsider her decision, he was more reticent. He would not reveal what she had said. But there was no pride or self-looking in the anxiety about the result which he frankly expressed; and it is probable that if Bell had heard him then, she would have learned more of his nature and sentiments than during any hour's stroll under the supervision of her guardians.

When at length we turned, a shock of wonder struck upon our eyes. The day had begun to break in the east, and a cold wind was stirring. As yet, there was only a faint light in the dark sky; but by and by a strange, clear whiteness rose up from behind the still landscape, and then a wild, cold, yellow radiance, against which the tall poplars looked intensely black, overspread the far regions of the east. Wan and unearthly seemed that metallic glare, even when a pale glimmer of red ran up and through it; and, as yet, it looked like the sunrise of some other world, for neither man nor beast was awake to greet it; and all the woods were as silent as the grave. When we got back to Garstang, the wind came chill along the grey stones, the birds were singing, and the glow of the sunrise was creeping over the chimneys and slates

of the sleeping houses. We left this wonderful light outside; plunged into the warm and gloomy passage of the inn; and presently tumbled, tired and shivering, into bed.

## CHAPTER XX.

### CHLOE'S GARLAND.

"The pride of every grove I chose,
The violet sweet and lily fair,
The dappled pink and blushing rose,
To deck my charming Chloe's hair.

"At morn the nymph vouchsafed to place
Upon her brow the various wreath;
The flowers less blooming than her face,
The scent less fragrant than her breath.

"The flowers she wore along the day,
And every nymph and shepherd said,
That in her hair they looked more gay
Than glowing in their native bed."

Is there any blue half so pure, and deep, and tender, as that of the large crane's-bill, the *Geranium pratense* of the botanists? When Bell saw the beautiful, rich-coloured blossoms in the tall hedge-rows, she declared we were already in the North Country, and must needs descend from the phaeton to gather some of the wild-flowers; and lo! all around there was such a profusion that she stood bewildered before them. Everywhere about were the white stars of the stitchwort glimmering among the green of the goose-grass. The clear red blossoms of the campion shone here and there; and the viscid petals of the Ragged Robin glimmered a bright crimson as they straggled through the thorny branches of the hawthorn. Here, too, was the beautiful hare-bell—the real "blue-bell of Scotland"—with its slender stem and its pellucid colour; and here was its bigger and coarser relative, the great hedge campanula, with its massive bells of azure, and its succulent stalk. There were yellow masses of snap-

dragon; and an abundance of white and pink roses sweetening the air; and all the thousand wonders of a luxuriant vegetation. The Lieutenant immediately jumped down. He harried the hedges as if they had been a province of the enemy's country, and he in quest of forage and food. The delight of Bell in these wild-flowers was extravagant, and when he had gathered for her every variety of hue that he could see, she chose a few of the blossoms and twisted them, with a laugh of light pleasure, into the breezy masses of her hair. Could a greater compliment have been paid him?

If it was not really the North-country which Bell so longed to enter, it was on the confines of it, and already many premonitory signs were visible. These tall hedge-rows, with their profusion of wild-flowers, were a wonder. We crossed dark-brown streams, the picturesque banks of which were smothered in every sort of bush and herb and plant. At last, a breath of the morning air brings us a strange, new scent, that is far more grateful than that of any wreath of flowers, and at the same moment both Bell and Tita call out—

"Oh, there is the peat-smoke at last!"

Peat-smoke it is, and presently we come upon the cottages which are sending abroad this fragrance into the air. They are hidden down in a dell by the side of a small river, and they are surrounded by low and thick elder-trees. Bell is driving. She will not even stop to look at this picturesque little nook: it is but an outpost, and the promised land is nigh.

The day, meanwhile, is grey and showery; but sometimes a sudden burst of sunshine springs down on the far, flat landscape, and causes it to shine in the distance. We pass by many a stately Hall and noble Park—Bell, with the wild-flowers in her hair, still driving until we reach the top of a certain height, and find a great prospect lying before us. The windy day has cleared away the light clouds in the west; and there, under a belt of blue sky, lies a glimmer of

the sea. The plain of the landscape leading down to it is divided by the estuary of the Lune; and as you trace the course of the river, up through the country that lies grey under the grey portion of the heavens, some tall buildings are seen in the distance, and a fortress upon a height resembling some smaller Edinburgh Castle. We drive on through the gusty day—the tail of a shower sometimes overtaking us from the south and causing a hurried clamour for waterproofs, which have immediately to be set aside as the sun bursts forth again, and then we dive into a clean, bright, picturesque town, and find ourselves in front of the King's Arms at Lancaster.

Bell has taken the flowers from her hair, in nearing the abodes of men; but she has placed them tenderly by the side of the bouquet that the Lieutenant gathered for her, and now she gently asks a waiter for a tumbler of water, into which the blossoms are put. The Lieutenant watches her every movement as anxiously as ever a Roman watched the skimmings and dippings of the bird whose flight was to predict ruin or fortune to him. He had no opportunities to lose. Time was pressing on. That night we were to reach Kendal; and there the enemy was lying in wait.

Bell, at least, did not seem much to fear that meeting with Arthur. When she spoke of him to Tita, she was grave and thoughtful; but when she spoke of Westmoreland, there was no qualification of her unbounded hope and delight. She would scarce look at Lancaster; although, when we went up to the castle, and had a walk round to admire the magnificent view from the walls, an unwonted stir in front of the great gate told us that something unusual had happened. The Lieutenant went down and mixed with the crowd. We saw him—a head and shoulders taller than the assemblage of men and women—speaking now to one and now to another; and then at length he came back.

"Madame," he says, "there is something wonderful to be seen in the castle. All these people are pressing to get in."

"Is it some soup plate of Henry the Eighth that has been disinterred?" she asks, with a slight show of scorn. Indeed, she seldom loses an opportunity of sticking another needle into her mental image of that poor monarch.

"Oh no, it is something much more interesting. It is a murderer."

"A murderer!"

"Yes, Madame, but you need not feel alarmed. He is caged—he will not bite. All these good people are going in to look at him."

"I would not look at the horrid creature for worlds."

"He is not a monster of iniquity," I tell her. "On the contrary, he is a harmless creature, and deserves your pity. All he did was to kill his wife."

"And I suppose they will punish him with three months' imprisonment," says Queen Tita; "whereas they would give him seven years if he had stolen a purse with half-a-crown in it."

"Naturally. I consider three months a great deal too much, however. Doubtless she contradicted him."

"But it is not true, Tita," says Bell; "none of us knew that the murderer was in the castle until this moment. How can you believe that he killed his wife?"

"There may be a secret sympathy between these two," says my Lady, with a demure laugh in her eyes, "which establishes a communication between them which we don't understand. You know the theory of brain-waves. But it is hard that the one should be within the prison and the other without."

"Yes, it's very hard for the one without. The one inside the prison has got rid of his torment and escaped into comparative quiet."

She is a dutiful wife. She never retorts—when she hasn't a retort ready. She takes my arm just as if nothing had happened, and we go down from the castle square into the town. And behold! as we enter the grey thoroughfare, a wonderful sight comes into

view. Down the far white street, where occasional glimpses of sunlight are blown across by the wind, a gorgeous procession is seen to advance—glittering in silver, and coloured plumes, and all the pomp and circumstance of a tournament. There is a cry of amazement throughout Lancaster; and from all points of the compass people hurry up. It is just two; and men from the factories, flocking out for their dinner, stand amazed on the pavement. The procession comes along through the shadow and the sunlight like some gleaming and gigantic serpent with scales of silver and gold. There are noble knights, dressed in complete armour, and seated on splendid chargers. They bring with them spears, and banners, and other accessories of war; and their horses are shining with the magnificence of their trappings. There are ladies wearing the historical costumes which are familiar to us in picture galleries, and they are seated on cream-white palfreys, with flowing manes, and tails that sweep the ground. Then a resplendent palanquin appears in view, drawn by six yellow horses, and waving and trembling with plumes of pink and white. Inside this great and gilded carriage, the Queen of Beauty sits enthroned, attended by ladies whose trains of silk and satin shine like the neck of a dove. And the while our eyes are still dazzled with the glory of this slowly passing pageant, the end of it appears in the shape of a smart and natty little trap, driven by the proprietor of the circus in plain clothes. The anti-climax is too much. The crowd regard this wretched fellow with disdain. When a historical play is produced, and we are introduced to the majesty of war, and even shown the king's tent on the battle-field, the common sutler is hidden out of sight. This wretched man's obtrusion of himself was properly resented; for the spectacle of the brilliant procession coming along the grey and white thoroughfares, with a breezy sky overshadowing or lighting it up, was sufficiently imposing, and ought not to have been destroyed by the vanity of a person in plain clothes who wanted to let

us know that he was the owner of all this splendour, and who thought he ought to come last, as Noah did on going into the Ark.

"Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds!"—that was the wish I knew lay deep down in Bell's heart as we went away from Lancaster. If Castor and Pollux did their work gallantly, we should sleep to-night in Kendal, and thereafter there would be abundant rest. This last day's journey consisted of thirty-three miles—considerably above our average day's distance—and we had accordingly cut it up into three portions. From Garstang to Lancaster is eleven miles; from Lancaster to Burton is eleven miles; from Burton to Kendal is eleven miles. Now Burton is in Westmoreland; and, once within her own county, Bell knew she was at home.

'Twas a perilous sort of day in which to approach the region of the Northern Lakes. In the best of weather, the great mass of mountains that stand on the margin of the sea ready to condense any moist vapours that may float in from the west and south, play sudden tricks sometimes and drown the holiday-makers whom the sun has drawn out of the cottages, houses, and hotels up in the deep valleys. But here there were abundant clouds racing and chasing each other like the folks who sped over Cannobie Lea to overtake the bride of young Lochinvar; and now and again the wind would drive down on us the flying fringes of one of these masses of vapour, producing a temporary fear. Bell cared least for these premonitions. She would not even cover herself with a cloak. Many a time we could see raindrops glimmering in her brown hair and dripping from the flowers that she had again twisted in the folds; but she sat erect and glad, with a fine colour in her face that the wet breeze only heightened. When we got up to Slyne and Bolton-le-Sands, and came in sight of the long sweep of Morecambe Bay, she paid no attention to the fact that all along the far margin of the sea the clouds had melted into a white belt of rain. It

was enough for her that the sun was out there too; sometimes striking with a pale silvery light on the plain of the sea, sometimes throwing a stronger colour on the long curve of level sand. A wetter or windier sight never met the view of an apprehensive traveller than that great stretch of sea and sky. The glimmer of the sun only made the moisture in the air more apparent as the grey clouds were sent flying up from the south-west. We could not tell whether the sea was breaking white or not; but the fierce blowing of the wind was apparent in the hurrying trails of cloud and the rapidly shifting shafts of sunlight that now and again shot down on the sands.

"Bell," said Tita, with a little anxiety, "you used to pride yourself on being able to forecast the weather, when you lived up among the hills. Don't you think we shall have a wet afternoon?—and we have nearly twenty miles to go yet."

The girl laughed.

"Mademoiselle acknowledges we shall have a little rain," said the Lieutenant, with a grim smile. If Bell was good at studying the appearances of the sky, he had acquired some skill in reading the language of her eloquent face.

"Why," says one of the party, "a deaf man down in a coal-pit could tell what sort of afternoon we shall have. The wind is driving the clouds up. The hills are stopping them on the way. When we enter Westmoreland we shall find the whole forces of the rain-fiends drawn out in array against us. But that is nothing to Bell, so long as we enter Westmoreland."

"Ah, you shall see," remarks Bell; "we may have a little rain this evening."

"Yes, that is very likely," said the Lieutenant, who seemed greatly tickled by this frank admission.

"But to-morrow, if this strong wind keeps up all night, would you be astonished to find Kendal with its stone houses all shining white in the sun?"

"Yes, I should be astonished."

"You must not provoke the prophetess," says my

Lady, who is rather nervous about rainy weather, "or she will turn round on you, and predict all sorts of evil."

We could not exactly tell when we crossed the border line of Westmoreland, or doubtless Bell would have jumped down from the phaeton to kneel and kiss her native soil; but at all events when we reached the curious little village of Burton we knew we were then in Westmoreland, and Bell ushered us into the ancient hostelry of the Royal Oak as if she had been the proprietress of that and all the surrounding country. In former days Burton was doubtless a place of importance, when the stage-coaches stopped here before plunging into the wild mountain-country; and in the inn, which remains pretty much what it was in the last generation, were abundant relics of the past. When the Lieutenant and I returned from the stables to the old-fashioned little parlour and museum of the place, we found Bell endeavouring to get some quivering, trembling, jangling notes out of the piano, that was doubtless a fine piece of furniture at one time. A piece of yellow ivory informed the beholder that this venerable instrument had been made by "Thomas Tomkison, Dean Street, Soho, Manufacturer to his Royal Highness the Prince Regent." And what was this that Bell was hammering out?

> "The standard on the braes o' Mar
> Is up and streaming rarely!
> The gathering pipe on Lochnagar
> Is sounding lang and clearly!
> The Highlandmen, from hill and glen,
> In martial hue, wi' bonnets blue,
> Wi' belted plaids and burnished blades,
> Are coming late and early."

How the faded old instrument groaned and quivered as if it were struggling to get up some martial sentiment of its half-forgotten youth! It did its best to pant after that rapid and stirring air, and laboured and jangled in a pathetic fashion through the chords. It seemed like some poor old pensioner, decrepit

and feeble-eyed, who sees a regiment passing with their band playing, and who tries to straighten himself up as he hears the tread of the men, and would fain step out to the sound of the music, but that his thin legs tremble beneath him. The wretched old piano struggled hard to keep up with the Gathering of the Clans as they hastened on to the braes o' Mar:—

'Wha wouldna join our noble chief,
The Drummond and Glengarry;
Macgregor, Murray, Rollo, Keith,
Panmure and gallant Harry!
Macdonald's men,
Clan Ranald's men,
M'Kenzie's men,
MacGilvray's men,
Strathallan's men,
The Lowland men
Of Callander and Airlie!"

until my Lady put her hand gently on Bell's shoulder, and said—

"My dear, this is worse than eating green apples."

Bell shut down the lid.

"It is time for this old thing to be quiet," she said. "The people who sang with it when it was in its prime, they cannot sing any more now, and it has earned its rest."

Bell uttered these melancholy words as she turned to look out of the window. It was rather a gloomy afternoon. There was less wind visible in the motion of the clouds, but in place of the flying and hurrying masses of vapour, an ominous pall of grey was visible, and the main thoroughfare of Burton-in-Kendal was gradually growing moister under a slow rain. Suddenly the girl said—

"Is it possible for Arthur to have reached Kendal?"

The Lieutenant looked up, with something of a frown on his face.

"Yes," I say to her, "if he keeps up the pace with which he started. Thirty miles a day in a light dog-cart will not seriously damage the Major's cob, if only he gets a day's rest now and again."

"Then perhaps Arthur may be coming along this road just now?"

"He may; but it is hardly likely. He would come over by Kirkby Lonsdale."

"I think we should be none the worse for his company, if he were to arrive," said Tita, with a little apprehension, "for it will be dark long before we get to Kendal—and on such a night, too, as we are likely to have."

"Then let us start at once, Madame," said the Lieutenant. "The horses will be ready to be put in harness now, I think; and they must have as much time for the rest of the journey as we can give them. Then the waterproofs—I will have them all taken out, and the rugs. We shall want much more than we have, I can assure you of that. And the lamps—we shall want them too."

The Lieutenant walked off to the stables with these weighty affairs of state possessing his mind. He was as anxious to preserve these two women from suffering a shower of rain as if he thought they were made of bride's-cake. Out in the yard we found him planning the disposal of the rugs with the eye of a practised campaigner, and taking every boy and man in the place into his confidence. Whatever embarrassment his imperfect English might cause him in a drawing-room, there was no need to guard his speech in a stable-yard. But sometimes our Uhlan was puzzled. What could he make, for example, of the following sentence, addressed to him by a worthy ostler at Garstang: "*Yaas, an ah gied'n a aff booket o' chilled watter after ah'd weshen 'n?*" Of the relations of the Lieutenant with the people whom he thus casually encountered, it may be said generally that he was "hail, fellow, well met," with any man who seemed of a frank and communicable disposition. With a good-natured landlord or groom, he would stand for any length of time talking about horses, their food, their ways, and the best methods of doctoring them. But when he encountered a sulky ostler, the unfortunate man had an evil time of it.

His temper was not likely to be improved by the presence of this lounging young soldier, who stood whistling at the door of the stable and watching that every bit of the grooming was performed to a nicety, who examined the quality of the oats, and was not content with the hay, and who calmly stood by with his cigar in his mouth until he had seen the animals eat every grain of corn that had been put in the manger. The bad temper, by the way, was not always on the side of the ostler.

A vague proposition that we should remain at Burton for that night was unanimously rejected. Come what might, we should start in Kendal with a clear day before us; and what mattered this running through our final stage in rain? A more feasible proposition, that both the women should sit in front so as to get the benefit of the hood, was rejected because neither of them would assume the responsibility of driving in the dark. But here a new and strange difficulty occurred. Of late, Bell and the Lieutenant had never sat together in the phaeton. Now, the Lieutenant declared it was much more safe that the horses should be driven by their lawful owner, who was accustomed to them. Accordingly, my post was in front. Thereupon, Bell, with many protestations of endearment, insisted on Queen Tita having the shelter of the hood. Bell, in fact, would not get up until she had seen my Lady safely ensconced there and swathed up like a mummy; it followed, accordingly, that Bell and her companion were hidden from us by the hood; and the last of our setting-out arrangements was simply this—that the Lieutenant absolutely and firmly refused to wear his waterproof, because, as he said, it would only have the effect of making the rain run in streams on to Bell's tartan plaid. The girl put forward all manner of entreaties in vain. The foolish young man—he was on the headstrong side of thirty—would not hear of it.

So we turned the horses' heads to the north. Alas! over the mountainous country before us there lay an

ominous darkness of sky. As we skirted Curwen Woods and drove by within sight of Clawthorpe Fell, the road became more hilly and more lonely, and it seemed as if we were to plunge into an unknown region inhabited only by mountains and hanging clouds. Nevertheless we could hear Bell laughing and chatting to the Lieutenant, and talking about what we should have to endure before we got to Kendal. As the wind rose slightly and blew the light waves of her laughter about, Tita called through to her, and asked her to sing again that Gathering of the Clans on the breezy braes o' Mar. But what would the wild mountain-spirits have done to us had they heard the twanging of a guitar up in this dismal region, to say nothing of the rain that would have destroyed the precious instrument for ever? For it was now pattering considerably on the top of the hood, and the wind had once more begun to blow. The darkness grew apace. The winding grey thread of the road took us up hill and down dale, twisting through a variegated country, of which we could see little but the tall hedges on each side of us. The rain increased. The wind blew it about, and moaned through the trees, and made a sound in the telegraph-wires overhead. These tall grey poles were destined to be an excellent guide to us. As the gloom gathered over us, we grew accustomed to the monotonous rising and falling of the pale road, while here and there we encountered a great pool of water, which made the younger of the horses swerve from time to time. By and by we knew it would be impossible to make out any finger-post; so that the murmuring of the telegraph-wires in the wind promised to tell us if we were still keeping the correct route to Kendal.

So we plunged on in the deepening twilight, splashing into the shallow pools, and listening to the whistling of the wind and the hissing of the rain. Bell had made no attempt to call out the clans on this wild night, and both of the young folks had for the most part relapsed into silence, unless when they called

to us some consolatory message or assurance that on the whole they rather enjoyed getting wet. But at last the Lieutenant proposed that he should get down and light the lamps; and, indeed, it was high time.

He got down. He came round to the front. Why the strange delay of his movements? He went round again to his seat, kept searching about for what seemed an unconscionable time, and then, coming back, said rather indifferently—

"Do you happen to have a match with you?"

"No," said I; and at the same moment Tita broke into a bright laugh.

She knew the shame and mortification that were now on the face of the Lieutenant, if only there had been more light to see him as he stood there. To have an old campaigner tricked in this way! He remained irresolute for a second or two; and then he said in accents of profound vexation—

"It is such stupidity as I never saw. I did leave my case in the inn. Madame, you must pardon me this ridiculous thing; and we must drive on until we come to a house."

A house! The darkness had now come on so rapidly that twenty houses would scarcely have been visible, unless with yellow lights burning in their windows. There was nothing for it but to urge on our wild career as best we might; while we watched the telegraph-posts to tell us how the road went, and Castor and Pollux, with the wet streaming down them, whirled the four wheels through the water and mud.

Tita had been making merry over our mishap, but this jocularity died away in view of the fact that at every moment there was a chance of our driving into a ditch. She forgot to laugh in her efforts to make out the road before us; and at last, when we drove into an avenue of trees under which there was pitch blackness, and as we felt that the horses were going down a hill, she called out to stop, so that one of us should descend and explore the way.

A blacker night has not occurred since the separating of light and darkness at the Creation; and when the Lieutenant had got to the horses' heads, it was with the greatest difficulty he could induce them to go forward and down the hill. He had himself to feel his way in a very cautious fashion; and, indeed, his managing to keep the phaeton somewhere about the middle of the road until we had got from under this black avenue must be regarded as a feat. He had scarcely got back into his seat, when the rain, which had been coming down pretty heavily, now fell in torrents. We could hear it hissing in the pools of the road, and all around us on the trees and hedges, while the phaeton seemed to be struggling through a waterfall. No plaids, rugs, mackintoshes, or other device of man, could keep this deluge out; and Tita, with an air of calm resignation, made the remark that one of her shoes had come off and floated away. To crown all, we suddenly discovered that the telegraph-posts had abandoned us, and gone off along another road.

I stopped the horses. To miss one's way in the wilds of Westmoreland on such a night was no joke.

"Now, Bell, what has become of your knowledge of this district? Must we go back, and follow the telegraph-wires? Or shall we push on on chance?"

"I can neither see nor speak for the rain," cries Bell out of the darkness. "But I think we ought to follow the telegraph-wires. They are sure to lead to Kendal."

"With your permission, Mademoiselle," said the Lieutenant, who was once more down in the road, "I think it would be a pity to go back. If we drive on, we must come to a village somewhere."

"They don't happen so often in Westmoreland as you might expect," says Bell, despondently.

"If you will wait here, then, I will go forward, and see if I can find a house," says the Lieutenant, at which Queen Tita laughs again, and says we should all be washed away before he returned.

The Lieutenant struggles into his seat. We push on blindly. The rain is still thundering down on us;

and we wonder whether we are fated to find ourselves in the early dawn somewhere about Wast Water or Coniston.

*About two hours before midnight, Columbus, standing on the forecastle, observed a light at a distance,* and privately pointed it out to Queen Titania.

"'Tis a turnpike, as I am a living navigator!" exclaimed the adventurous man.

A gun would have been fired from the deck of the *Pinta* to announce these joyful tidings, only that the rain had washed away our powder. But now that we were cheered with the sight of land, we pushed ahead gallantly; the light grew in size and intensity; there could be no doubt this wild region was inhabited by human beings; and at last a native appeared, who addressed us in a tongue which we managed with some difficulty to understand, and, having exacted from us a small gift, he allowed us to proceed.

Once more we plunge into darkness and wet, but we know that Kendal is near. Just as we are approaching the foot of the hill, however, on which the town stands, a wild shriek from Titania startles the air. The black shadow of a dog-cart is seen to swerve across in front of the horses' heads, and just skims by our wheels. The wrath that dwelt in my Lady's heart with regard to the two men in this phantom vehicle need not be expressed; for what with the darkness of the trees, and the roaring of the wind and rain, and the fact of these two travellers coming at a fine pace along the wrong side of the road, we just escaped a catastrophe.

But we survived that danger, too, as we survived the strife of the elements. We drove up into the town. We wheeled round by the archway of still another King's Arms; and presently a half-drowned party of people — with their eyes, grown accustomed to the darkness, wholly bewildered with the light—were standing in the warm and yellow glare of the hotel. There was a fluttering of dripping waterproofs, a pulling asunder of soaked plaids, and a drying of wet and gleaming cheeks that were red with the rain. The

commotion raised by our entrance was alarming. You would have thought we had taken possession of this big, warm, comfortable, old-fashioned inn. A thousand servants seemed to be scampering about the house to assist us; and by and by, when all those moist garments had been taken away, and other and warmer clothing put on, and a steaming and fragrant banquet placed on the table, you should have seen the satisfaction that dwelt on every face. Arthur had not come—at least, no one had been making inquiries for us. There was nothing for us but to attack the savoury feast, and relate with laughter and with gladness all the adventures of the day, until you would have thought that the grave mother of those two boys at Twickenham had grown merry with the champagne, whereas she had not yet tasted the wine that was frothing and creaming in her glass.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### ALL ABOUT WINDERMERE.

"O meekest dove
Of Heaven! O Cynthia, ten-times bright and fair!
From thy blue throne, now filling all the air,
Glance but one little beam of tempered light
Into my bosom, that the dreadful might
And tyranny of love be somewhat scared."

It is a pleasant thing, especially in holiday-time, when one happens to have gone to bed with the depressing consciousness that outside the house the night is wild and stormy—rain pouring ceaselessly down and the fine weather sped away to the south—to catch a sudden glimmer, just as one opens one's eyes in the morning, of glowing green, where the sunlight is quivering on the waving branches of the trees. The new day is a miracle of freshness. The rain has washed the leaves, and the wind is shaking and rustling them in the warm light. You throw open the window, and the breeze

that comes blowing in is sweet with the smell of wet roses. It is a new, bright, joyous day; and the rain and the black night have fled together.

Bell's audacity in daring to hope we might have a fine morning after that wild evening, had almost destroyed our belief in her weather foresight; but sure enough, when we got up on the following day, the stone houses of Kendal were shining in the sun, and a bright light colouring up the faces of the country people who had come into the town on early business. And what was this we heard?—a simple and familiar air that carried Tita back to that small church in Surrey over which she presides—sung carelessly and lightly by a young lady who certainly did not know that she could be overheard—

> "Hark, hark, my soul, angelic songs are swelling
> O'er earth's green fields and ocean's wave-beat shore."

—Bell was at her orisons; but as the hymn only came to us in fitful and uncertain snatches, we concluded that the intervals were filled up by that light-hearted young woman twisting up the splendid folds of her hair. There was no great religious fervour in her singing, to be sure. Sometimes the careless songstress forgot to add the words, and let us have fragments of the pretty air, of which she was particularly fond. But there was no reason at all why this pious hymn should be suddenly forsaken for the "*rataplan, rataplan, rataplan—rataplan, plan, plan plan, plan,*" of the "Daughter of the Regiment."

When we went down stairs, Bell was gravely perusing the morning papers. At this time the Government were hurrying their Ballot Bill through the House, and the daily journals were full of clauses, amendments, and divisions. Bell wore rather a puzzled look; but she was so deeply interested—whether with the Parliamentary Summary or the Fashionable Intelligence, can only be guessed—that she did not observe our entering the room. My Lady went gently forward to her, and said—

> "Hark, hark, my soul, angelic songs are swelling
> O'er earth's green fields——"

The girl looked up with a start, and with a little look of alarm.

"Young ladies," observed Tita, "who have a habit of humming airs during their toilet, ought to be sure that their room is not separated by a very thin partition from any other room."

"If it was only you, I don't care."

"It mightn't have been only me."

"There is no great harm in a hymn," says Bell.

"But when one mixes up a hymn with that wicked song which Maria and the Sergeant sing together? Bell, we will forgive you everything this morning. You are quite a witch with the weather, and you shall have a kiss for bringing us such a beautiful day."

The morning salutation was performed.

"Isn't there enough of that to go round?" says the third person of the group. "Bell used to kiss me dutifully every morning. But a French writer has described a young lady as a creature that ceases to kiss gentlemen at twelve and begins again at twenty."

"A French writer!" says Tita. "No French writer ever said anything so impertinent and so stupid. The French are a cultivated nation, and their wit never takes the form of rudeness."

A nation or a man—it is all the same: attack either, and my Lady is ready with a sort of formal warranty of character.

"But why, Tita," says Bell, with just a trifle of protest in her voice, "why do you always praise the French nation? Other nations are as good as they are."

The laughter that shook the coffee-room of the King's Arms in Kendal, when this startling announcement was made to us cannot be conveyed in words. There was something so boldly ingenuous in Bell's protest that even Tita laughed till the tears stood in her eyes, and then she kissed Bell, and asked her pardon, and remarked that she was ready to acknowledge at any moment that the German nation was as good as the French nation.

"I did not mean anything of the kind," says Bell,

looking rather shamefaced. "What does it matter to me what anyone thinks of the German nation?"

That was a true observation, at least. It did not matter to her, nor to anybody. The anthropomorphic abstractions which we call nations are very good pegs to hang prejudices on; but they do not suffer or gain much by any opinion we may form of their "characteristics."

"Where is Count von Rosen?" says Tita.

"I do not know," answered Bell, with an excellent assumption of indifference. "I have not seen him this morning. Probably he will come in and tell us that he has been to Windermere."

"No, Mademoiselle," said the Lieutenant, entering the room at the same moment, "I have not been to Windermere, but I am very anxious to go, for the morning is very fresh and good, and is it possible to say that it will remain fine all the day? We may start directly after breakfast. I have looked at the horses—they are all very well, and have suffered nothing from the rain—they are looking contented and comfortable after the bran-mash of last night, and to-morrow they will start again very well."

"And you have heard nothing of Arthur?" says my Lady.

"No."

Was the Lieutenant likely to have been scouring the country in search of that young man?

"It is very strange. If he found himself unable to get here by the time he expected to meet us, it is a wonder he did not send on a message. I hope he has met with no accident."

"No, there is no fear, Madame," said the Lieutenant; "he will overtake us soon. He may arrive to-night, or to-morrow before we go—he cannot make a mistake about finding us. But you do not propose to wait anywhere for him?"

"No," I say, decisively, "we don't. Or if we do wait for him, it will not be in Kendal."

The Lieutenant seemed to think that Arthur would

overtake us soon enough; and need not further concern us. But my Lady appeared to be a little anxious about the safety of the young man until it was shown us that, after all, Arthur might have been moved to give the Major's cob a day's rest somewhere, in which case he could not possibly have reached Kendal by this time.

We go out into the sunlit and breezy street. We can almost believe Bell that there is a peculiar sweetness in the Westmoreland air. We lounge about the quaint old town, which, perched on the steep slope of a hill, has sometimes those curious juxtapositions of door-step and chimney-pot which are familiar to the successive terraces of Dartmouth. We go down to the green banks of the river; and the Lieutenant is bidden to observe how rapid and clear the brown stream is, even after coming through the dyeing and bleaching works. He is walking on in front with Bell. He does not strive to avoid her now—on the contrary, they are inseparable companions—but my Lady puzzles herself in vain to discover what are their actual relations towards each other at this time. They do not seem anxious or dissatisfied. They appear to have drifted back into those ordinary friendly terms of intercourse which had marked their setting out; but how is this possible after what occurred in Wales? As neither has said anything to us about these things, nothing is known; these confidences have been invariably voluntary, and my Lady is quite well pleased that Bell should manage her own affairs.

Certainly, if Bell was at this time being pressed to decide between Von Rosen and Arthur, that unfortunate youth from Twickenham was suffering grievously from an evil fortune. Consider what advantages the Lieutenant had in accompanying the girl into this dreamland of her youth, when her heart was opening out to all sorts of tender recollections, and when, to confer a great gratification upon her, you had only to say that you were pleased with Westmoreland, and its sunlight, and its people and scenery. What adjectives

that perfervid Uhlan may have been using—and he was rather a good hand at expressing his satisfaction with anything—we did not try to hear; but Bell wore her brightest and happiest looks. Doubtless the Lieutenant was telling her that there was no water in the world could turn out such brilliant colours as those we saw bleaching on the meadows—that no river in the world ran half as fast as the Kent—and that no light could compare with the light of a Westmoreland sky in beautifying and clarifying the varied hues of the landscape that lay around. He was greatly surprised with the old-fashioned streets when we had clambered up to the town again. He paid particular attention to the railway station. When a porter caught a boy back from the edge of the platform and angrily said to him, "Wut's thee doin' theear, an' the traäin a coomin' oop?" he made as though he understood the man. This was Bell's country; and everything in it was profoundly interesting.

However, when the train had once got away from the station, and we found ourselves being carried through the fresh and pleasant landscape—with a cool wind blowing in at the window, and all the trees outside bending and rustling in the breeze—it was not merely out of compliment to Bell that he praised the brightness of the day and the beauty of the country around.

"And it is so comforting to think of the horses enjoying a day's thorough rest," said Tita; "for when we start again to-morrow, they will have to attack some hard work."

"Only at first," said Bell, who was always ready to show that she knew the road; "the first mile or so is hilly; but after that the road goes down to Windermere and runs along by the lake to Ambleside. It is a beautiful drive through the trees; and if we get a day like this——"

No wonder she turned to look out with pride and delight on the glowing picture that lay around us—the background of which had glimpses of blue mountains lying pale and misty under light masses of cloud.

The small stations we passed were smothered in green foliage. Here and there we caught sight of a brown rivulet, or a long avenue of trees arching over a white road. And then, in an incredibly short space of time, we found ourselves outside the Windermere station, standing in the open glare of the day.

For an instant, a look of bewilderment, and even of disappointment, appeared on the girl's face. Evidently, she did not know the way. The houses that had sprung up of late years were strangers to her—strangers that seemed to have no business there. But whereas the new buildings, and the cutting of terraces and alterations of gardens, were novel and perplexing phenomena, the general features of the neighbourhood remained the same; and after a momentary hesitation she hit upon the right path up to Elleray, and thereafter was quite at home.

Now there rests in Bell's mind a strange superstition that she can remember, as a child, having sat upon Christopher North's knee. The story is wholly impossible and absurd; for Wilson died in the year in which Bell was born; but she nevertheless preserves the fixed impression of having seen the kingly old man, and wondered at his long hair and great collar, and listened to his talking to her. Out of what circumstance in her childhood this curious belief may have arisen is a psychological conundrum which Tita and I have long ago given up; and Bell herself cannot even suggest any other celebrated person of the neighbourhood who may, in her infancy, have produced a profound impression on her imagination and caused her to construct a confused picture into which the noble figure of the old Professor had somehow and subsequently been introduced; but none the less she asks us how it is that she can remember exactly the expression of his face and eyes as he looked down on her, and how even to this day she can recall the sense of awe with which she regarded him, even as he was trying to amuse her.

The Lieutenant knew all about this story; and it was with a great interest that he went up to Elleray Cottage,

and saw the famous chestnut which Christopher North has talked of to the world. It was as if some relative of Bell's had lived in this place—some foster-father or grand-uncle who had watched her youth; and who does not know the strange curiosity with which a lover listens to stories of the childhood of his sweetheart, or meets anyone who knew her in those old and half-forgotten years? It seems a wonderful thing to him that he should not have known her then—that all the world at that time, so far as he knew, was unconscious of her magical presence; and he seeks to make himself familiar with her earliest years, to nurse the delusion that he has known her always, and that ever since her entrance into the world she has belonged to him. In like manner, let two lovers, who have known each other for a number of years, begin to reveal to each other when the first notion of love entered their mind; they will insensibly shift the date further and further back, as if they would blot out the pallid and colourless time in which they were stupid enough not to have found out their great affection for each other. The Lieutenant was quite vexed that he knew little of Professor Wilson's works. He said he would get them all the moment that he went back to London; and when Bell, as we lingered about the grounds of Elleray, told him how that there was a great deal of Scotch in the books, and how the old man whom she vaguely recollected had written about Scotland, and how that she had about as great a longing—when she was buried away down south in the commonplaceness of London and Surrey—to smell the heather and see the lovely glens and the far-reaching sea-lakes of the Highlands, as to reach her own and native Westmoreland, the Lieutenant began to nurture a secret affection for Scotland, and wondered when we should get there.

I cannot describe in minute detail our day's ramble about Windermere. It was all a dream to us. Many years had come and gone since those of us who were familiar with the place had been there; and somehow, half unconsciously to ourselves, we kept trying to get

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away from the sight of new people and new houses, and to discover the old familiar features of the neighbourhood that we had loved. Once or twice there was in Tita's eyes a moisture she could scarce conceal; and the light of gladness on Bell's bright face was preserved there chiefly through her efforts to instruct the Lieutenant, which made her forget old memories. She was happy, too, in hitting on the old paths. When we went down from Elleray through the private grounds that lie along the side of the hill, she found no difficulty whatever in showing us how we were to get to the lake. She took us down through a close and sweet-smelling wood, where the sunlight only struggled at intervals through the innumerable stems and leaves, and lit up the brackens, and other ferns and underwood. There was a stream running close by, that plashed and gurgled along its stony channel. As we got further down the slope, the darkness of the avenue increased; and then all at once, at the end of the trees, we came in sight of a blinding glare of white—the level waters of the lake.

And then, when we left the wood and stood on the shore, all the fair plain of Windermere lay before us—wind-swept and troubled, with great dashes of blue along its surface, and a breezy sky moving overhead. Near at hand, there were soft green hills, shining in the sunlight; and, further off, long and narrow promontories, piercing out into the water, with their dark line of trees growing almost black against the silver glory of the lake. But then again the hurrying wind would blow away the shadow of the cloud; a beam of sunlight would run along the line of trees, making them glow green above the blue of the water; and from this moving and shifting and shining picture we turned to the far and ethereal masses of the Langdale Pikes and the mountains above Ambleside, which changed as the changing clouds were blown over from the west.

We got a boat and went out into the wilderness of water and wind and sky. Now we saw the reedy shores behind us, and the clear and shallow water at the brink of which we had been standing, receiving the troubled

reflection of the woods. Out here the beautiful islands of Lady Holm, Thompson's Holm, and Belle Isle were shimmering in green. Far up there in the north the slopes and gullies of the great mountains were showing a thousand hues of soft velvet-like greys and blues, and even warming up into a pale yellowish green, where a ray of the sunlight struck the lower slopes. Over by Furness Fells the clouds lay in heavier masses, and moved slowly; but elsewhere there was a brisk motion over the lake, that changed its beauties even as one looked at them.

"Mademoiselle," observed the Lieutenant, as if a new revelation had broken upon him, "all that you have said about your native county is true; and now I understand why that you did weary in London, and think very much of your own home."

Perhaps he thought, too, that there was but one county in England, or in the world, that could have produced this handsome, courageous, generous, and true-hearted English girl—for such are the exaggerations that lovers cherish.

We put into Bowness, and went up to the Crown Hotel there. In an instant—as rapidly as Alloway Kirk became dark when Tam o' Shanter called out—the whole romance of the day went clean out and was extinguished. How any of God's creatures could have come to dress themselves in such fashion, amid such scenery, our young Uhlan professed himself unable to tell; but here were men—apparently in their proper senses—wearing such comicalities of jackets and resplendent knickerbockers as would have made a harlequin blush, with young ladies tarred and feathered, as it were, with staring stripes and alarming petticoats, and sailors' hats of straw. Why should the borders of a lake be provocative of these mad eccentricities? Who that has wandered about the neighbourhoods of Zürich, Luzern, and Thun, does not know the wild freaks which Englishmen (far more than Englishwomen) will permit to themselves in dress? We should have fancied those gentlemen with the variegated knickerbockers had just come

down from the Righi (by rail) if they had had Alpen-stocks and snow-spectacles with them; and, indeed, it was a matter for surprise that these familiar appurtenances were absent from the shores of Windermere.

My Lady looked at the strange people rather askance.

"My dear," says Bell, in an undertone, "they are quite harmless."

We had luncheon in a corner of the great room. Dinner was already laid; and our plain meal seemed to borrow a certain richness from that long array of coloured wine-glasses. Bell considered it rather pretty; but my Lady began to wonder how much crystal the servants would have broken by the time we got back to Surrey. Then we went down to the lake again, stepped into a small steamer, and stood out to sea.

It was now well on in the afternoon; and the masses of cloud that came rolling over from the west and south-west, when they clung to the summits of the mountains, threw a deeper shadow on the landscape beneath. Here and there, too, as the evening wore on and we had steamed up within sight of the small island that is called Seamew Crag, we occasionally saw one of the great heaps of cloud get melted down into a grey mist that for a few minutes blotted out the side of a mountain. Meanwhile the sun had also got well up to the north-west; and as the clouds came over and swept about the peaks of Langdale, a succession of the wildest atmospheric effects became visible. Sometimes a great gloom would overspread the whole landscape, and we began to anticipate a night of rain; then a curious saffron glow would appear behind the clouds; then a great smoke of grey would be seen to creep down the hill, and finally the sunlight would break through, shining on the retreating vapour and on the wet sides of the hills. Once or twice a light trail of cloud passed across the lake and threw a slight shower of rain upon us; but when we got to Ambleside, the clouds had been for the most part driven by, and the clear heavens—irradiated by a beautiful twilight—tempted us to walk back to Windermere village by the road.

You may suppose that that was a pleasant walk for those two young folks. Everything had conspired to please Bell during the day, and she was in a dangerously amiable mood. As the dusk fell, and the white water gleamed through the trees by the margin of the lake, we walked along the winding road without meeting a solitary creature; and Queen Titania gently let our young friends get on ahead, so that we could only see the two dark figures pass underneath the dark avenues of trees.

"Did you ever see a girl more happy?" she says.

"Yes, once—at Eastbourne."

Tita laughs, in a low, pleased way; for she is never averse to recalling these old days.

"I was very stupid then," she says.

That is a matter upon which she, of course, ought to be able to speak. It would be unbecoming to interfere with the right of private judgment.

"Besides," she remarks, audaciously, "I did not mean half I said. Don't you imagine I meant half what I said. It was all making fun, you know, wasn't it?"

"It has been deadly earnest since."

"Poor thing!" she says, in the most sympathetic way; and there is no saying what fatal thunderbolt she might have launched, had not her attention been called away just then.

For as we went along in the twilight it seemed to us that the old moss-covered wall was beginning to throw a slight shadow, and that the pale road was growing warmer in hue. Moved by the same impulse, we turned suddenly to the lake, and lo! out there beyond the trees a great yellow glory was lying on the bosom of Windermere, and somewhere—hidden by the dark branches—the low moon had come into the clear violet sky. We walked on until we came to a clearance in the trees, and there, just over the opposite shore, the golden crescent lay in the heavens, the purple of which was suffused by the soft glow. It was a wonderful twilight. The ripples that broke in among the reeds down at the shore quivered in lines of gold; and a little bit further out a

small boat lay black as night in the path of the moonlight. The shadow cast by the wall grew stronger; and now the trees, too, threw black bars across the yellow road. The two lovers paid no heed to these things for a long time—they wandered on, engrossed in talk. But at length we saw them stop and turn towards the lake; while Bell looked back towards us, with her face getting a faint touch of the glory coming over from the south.

All the jesting had gone out of Bell's face. She was as grave, and gentle, and thoughtful—when we reached the two of them—as Undine was on the day after her marriage; and insensibly she drew near to Tita, and took her away from us, and left the Lieutenant and myself to follow. That young gentleman was as solemn as though he had swallowed the Longer Catechism and the Westminster Confession of Faith. He admitted that it was a beautiful evening. He made a remark about the scenery of the district which would have served admirably as a motto for one of those views that stationers put at the head of their note-paper. And then, with some abruptness, he asked what we should do if Arthur did not arrive in Kendal that night or next day.

"If Arthur does not come to-night, we shall probably have some dinner at the King's Arms. If he does not come in the morning, we may be permitted to take some breakfast. And then, if his staying away does not alter the position of Windermere, we shall most likely drive along this very road to-morrow forenoon. But why this solemn importance conferred on Arthur all of a sudden?"

"Oh, I cannot tell you."

"Nobody asked you."

"But I will give you a very good cigar, my dear friend."

"That is a great deal better—but let it be old and dry."

And so we got back to Windermere station and took train to Kendal. By the time we were walking up through the streets of the old town the moon had swum further up into the heavens, and its light, now a pale silver, was shining along the fronts of the houses.

We went into the inn. No message from Arthur.

A little flutter of dismay disturbs the women, until the folly of imagining all manner of accidents—merely because an erratic young man takes a day longer to drive to Kendal than they anticipated—is pointed out to them. Then dinner, and Bell appears in her prettiest dress, so that even Tita, when she comes into the room, kisses her, as if the girl had performed a specially virtuous action in merely choosing out of a milliner's shop a suitable colour.

[*Note by Queen Titania.*—"I hope I am revealing no secrets; but it would be a great pity if anyone thought that Bell was *heartless*, or *indifferent*, a mistake that might occur when she is written about by one who makes a jest about *the most serious moments* in one's life. Now it was quite pitiable to see how the poor girl was troubled as we walked home that night by the side of Windermere. She as good as confessed to me—not in words, you know, for between women the least hint is *quite sufficient*, and saves a great deal of embarrassment—that she very much liked the Lieutenant, and admired his character, and that she was extremely vexed and sorry that she had been compelled to refuse him when he made her an offer. She told me, too, that he had pressed her not to make that decision final; and that she had admitted to him that it was really against her own wish that she had done so. But then she put it to me, as she had put it to him, what she would think of herself if she went and *betrayed* Arthur in this way. Really, I could not see any *betrayal* in the matter; and I asked her whether it would be fair to Arthur to marry him while she secretly would have preferred to marry another. She said she would try all in her power not to marry Arthur, if only he would be reconciled to her breaking with him; but then she immediately added, with an earnestness that I thought very *pathetic*, that if she treated Arthur badly, any other man might fairly expect her to treat him badly too; and if she could not satisfy herself that she had acted rightly throughout, she would not marry at all. It is a great pity I cannot show the readers of these few lines our pretty Bell's photograph, or they would see the *downright absurdity* of such a resolve as that. To think of a girl like her not marrying is simply out of the question; but the danger at this moment was that, in one of these foolish fits of determination, she would send the Lieutenant away altogether. *Then* I think there might be a chance of her not marrying at all; for I am *greatly mistaken* if she does not care a good deal more for him than she will acknowledge. I advised her to tell Arthur frankly how matters stand; but she seems afraid. Under any circumstances, he will be sure to discover the truth; and then it will be far worse for him than if she made a *full confession* just now, and got rid of all these perplexities and entanglements, which ought not to be throwing a cloud over a young face."]

## CHAPTER XXII.

### ON CAVIARE AND OTHER MATTERS.

"At the inn where we stopped he was exceedingly dissatisfied with some roast mutton which he had for dinner. The ladies, I saw, wondered to see the great philosopher, whose wisdom and wit they had been admiring all the way, get into ill-humour from such a cause."

"THERE is no Paradise without its Serpent," said my Lady, with a sigh, as we were about to leave the white streets of Kendal for the green heart of the Lake district.

A more cruel speech was never made. Arthur, for aught we knew, might be lying smashed up in a Yorkshire ditch. He had not overtaken us even on the morning after our arrival in Kendal. No message had come from him. Was this a time to liken him to the Father of Lies, when perhaps the Major's cob had taken him down a railway cutting or thrown him into a disused coalpit? What, for example, if his corpse had been brought into the King's Arms in which the above words were uttered? Would the Lieutenant have spoken of him contemptuously as "a pitiful fellow—oh, a very pitiful fellow!" Would Bell have borne his presence with a meek and embarrassed resignation; or would Queen Tita have regarded the young man—who used to be a great friend of hers—as one intending to do her a deadly injury?

"Poor Arthur!" I say. "Whither have all thy friends departed?"

"At least, he does not want for an apologist," says Tita, with a little unnecessary fierceness.

"Perhaps thou art lying under two wheels in a peaceful glade. Perhaps thou art floating out to the ocean on the bosom of a friendly stream—with all the companions of thy youth unheeding——"

"Stuff!" says Queen Titania; and when I observe that I will address no further appeal to her—for that a

lady who lends herself to match-making abandons all natural instincts and is insensible to a cry for pity—she turns impatiently and asks what I have done with her eau-de-cologne, as if the fate of Arthur were of less importance to her than that trumpery flask.

Wherever the young man was, we could gain no tidings of him; and so we went forth once more on our journey. But as the certainty was that he had not passed us, how was it that Queen Tita feared the presence of this evil thing in the beautiful land before us?

"For," said the Lieutenant, pretending he was quite anxious about the safety of the young man, and, on the whole, desirous of seeing him, "he may have gone to Carlisle, as he at first proposed, to meet us there."

"Oh, do you think so?" said Bell, eagerly. Was she glad, then, to think that during our wanderings in her native county we should not be accompanied by that unhappy youth?

But the emotions which perplexed my Lady's heart at this time were of the most curious sort. It was only by bits and snatches that the odd contradictions and intricacies of them were revealed. To begin with, she had a sneaking fondness for Arthur, begotten of old associations. She was vexed with him because he was likely to ruin her plan for the marriage of Bell and the Lieutenant; and when Tita thought of this delightful prospect being destroyed by the interference of Arthur, she grew angry, and regarded him as an unreasonable and officious young man, who ought to be sent about his business. Then again, when she recalled our old evenings in Surrey, and the pleasant time the boy had in sweethearting with our Bonny Bell during the long and lazy afternoon walks, she was visited with remorse, and wished she could do something for him. But a claimant of this sort who represents an injury is certain, sooner or later, to be regarded with dislike. He is continually reminding us that we have injured him, and disturbing our peace of mind. Sometimes Tita resented this claim (which was entirely of her own

imagining) so strongly as to look upon Arthur as a perverse and wicked intermeddler with the happiness of two young lovers. So the world wags. The person who is inconvenient to us does us a wrong. At the very basis of our theatrical drama lies the principle that non-success in a love affair is criminal. Two young men shall woo a young woman; the one shall be taken, and the other made a villain because he paid the girl the compliment of wanting to marry her, and justice shall not be satisfied until everybody has hounded and hunted the poor villain through all the phases of the play, until all the good people meet to witness his discomfiture, and he is bidden to go away and be a rejected suitor no more.

It was only in one of these varying moods that Tita had shown a partial indifference to Arthur's fate. She was really concerned about his absence. When she took her seat in the phaeton, she looked back and down the main thoroughfare of Kendal, half expecting to see the Major's cob and a small dog-cart come driving along. The suggestion that he might have gone on to Penrith or Carlisle comforted her greatly. The only inexplicable circumstance was that Arthur had not written or telegraphed to Kendal, at which town he knew we were to stop.

About five minutes after our leaving Kendal, Arthur was as completely forgotten as though no such hapless creature was in existence. We were all on foot except Tita, who remained in the phaeton to hold the reins in a formal fashion. For about a mile and a half the road gradually rises, giving a long spell of collar-work to horses with weight to drag behind them. Tita, who weighs about a feather and a half, was commissioned to the charge of the phaeton while the rest of us dawdled along the road, giving Castor and Pollux plenty of time. It was a pleasant walk. The Lieutenant—with an amount of hypocrisy of which I had not suspected him guilty—seemed to prefer to go by the side of the phaeton, and talk to the small lady sitting enthroned there; but Bell, once on foot and in her native air,

could not so moderate her pace. We set off up the hill. There was a scent of peat-reek in the air. A cool west wind was blowing through the tall hedges and the trees; and sudden shafts and gleams of sunlight fell from the uncertain sky and lit up the wild masses of weeds and flowers by the roadside. Bell pulled a white dog-rose, and kissed it as though a Westmoreland rose was an old friend she had come to see. She saw good jests in the idlest talk, and laughed; and all her face was aglow with delight as she looked at the beautiful country, and the breezy sky, and the blue peaks of the mountains that seemed to grow higher and higher the further we ascended the hill.

"You silly girl," I say to her, when she is eager to point out cottages built of stone, and stone-walls separating small orchards from the undulating meadows, "do you think there are no stone cottages anywhere but in Westmoreland?"

"I didn't say there wasn't," she answers, regardless of grammar.

Yes, we were certainly in Westmoreland. She had scarcely uttered the words when a rapid pattering was heard among the trees, and presently a brisk shower was raining down upon us. Would she return to the phaeton for a shawl? No. She knew the ways of Westmoreland showers on such a day as this—indeed, she had predicted that some of the heavy clouds being blown over from the other side of Windermere would visit us in passing. In a few minutes the shower lightened, the wind that shook the heavy drops from the trees seemed to bring dryness with it, and presently a warm glow of sunshine sprang down upon the road, and the air grew sweet with resinous and fragrant smells.

"It was merely to lay the dust," said Bell, as though she had ordered the shower.

After you pass Rather Heath, you go down into the valley of the Gowan. The road is more of a lane than a highway; and the bright and showery day added to the picturesqueness of the tall hedges and the wooded

country on both sides by sending across alternate splatches of gloom and bursts of sunlight. More than once, too, the tail-end of a shower caught us; but we cared little for rain that had wind and sunlight on the other side of it; and Bell, indeed, rather rejoiced in the pictorial effects produced by changing clouds, when the sunshine caused the heavier masses to grow black and ominous, or shone mistily through the frail sheet produced by the thinner masses melting into rain.

Tita is a pretty safe driver in Surrey, where she knows every inch of the roads and lanes, and has nothing to distract her attention; but now, among these hilly and stony Westmoreland roads, her enjoyment of the bright panorama around her considerably drew her attention away from the horses' feet. Then she was sorely troubled by news that had reached us that morning from home. An evil-doer, whom she had hitherto kept in order by alternate bribes and threats, had broken out again, and given his wife a desperate thrashing. Now this occurrence seldom happened except when both husband and wife were intoxicated; and for some time back my Lady had succeeded in stopping their periodical bouts. With these evil tidings came the report that a horrible old creature of sixty—as arrant a rogue as ever went on crutches, although my Lady would have taken the life of anyone who dared to say so of one of her pets—had deliberately gone to Guildford and pawned certain pieces of flannel which had been given her to sew. In short, as Bell proceeded to point out, the whole neighbourhood was in revolt. The chief administrator of justice and Queen's Almoner of the district was up here skylarking in a phaeton, while her subjects down in the south had broken out into flagrant rebellion. History tells of a Scotch parish that suddenly rose and hanged the minister, drowned the precentor, and raffled the church bell; who was now to answer for the safety of our most cherished parochial institutions when the guardian of law and order had withdrawn herself into the regions of the mountains?

"That revolt," it is observed, "is the natural consequence of tyranny. For years you have crushed down and domineered over that unhappy parish; and the unenfranchised millions, who had no more liberty than is vouchsafed to a stabled horse or a chained dog, have risen at last. *Mort aux tyrans!* Will they chase us, do you think, Bell?"

"I am quite convinced," remarked my Lady, deliberately and calmly, "that the poor old woman has done nothing of the kind. She could not do it. Why should she seek to gain a few shillings at the expense of forfeiting all the assistance she had to expect from me?"

"An independent peasantry is not to be bought over by pitiful bribes. 'Tis a free country; and the three balls ought to be placed among the insignia of Royalty, instead of that meaningless sphere. Can any student of history now present explain the original purpose of that instrument?"

"I suppose," says Bell, "that Queen Elizabeth, who always has it in her hand, used to chastise her maid-servants with it."

"Wrong. With that weapon Henry the Eighth was wont to strike down and murder the good priests that interfered with his unholy wishes."

"Henry the Eighth——" says my Lady; but just at this moment Castor caught a stone slightly with his foot, and the brief stumble caused my Lady to mind her driving; so that Henry the Eighth, wherever he is, may be congratulated on the fact that she did not finish her sentence.

Then we ran pleasantly along the valley until we came in sight, once more, of Windermere. We drove round the foot of the green slopes of Elleray. We plunged into the wood, and there was all around us a moist odour of toadstools and fern. We went by St. Catherine's, and over Troutbeck Bridge, and so down to the lake-side by Ecclerigg House and Lowood. It was along this road that Bell and her companion had walked the night before, when the yellow moon rose up in the

south and threw a strange light over Windermere. The Lieutenant had said not a word about the results of that long interview; but they had clearly not been unfavourable to him, for he had been in excellent good spirits during the rest of the evening, and now he was chatting to Bell as if nothing had occurred to break the even tenor of their acquaintanceship. They had quite resumed their old relations, which was a blessing to the two remaining members of the party. Indeed, there was no bar now placed upon Bell's singing except her own talking; and when a young lady undertakes to instruct her elders in the history, traditions, manners, customs, and peculiarities of Westmoreland, she has not much time for strumming on the guitar. Bell acted the part of *valet de place* to perfection, and preached at us just as if we were all as great strangers as the Lieutenant was. It is true our guide was not infallible. Sometimes we could see that she was in deep distress over the names of the peaks up in the neighbourhood of the Langdale Pikes; but what did it matter to us which was Scawfell and which was Bowfell, or which was Great Gable and which Great End? We had come to enjoy ourselves, not to correct the Ordnance Survey Maps.

"I am afraid," said my Lady, when some proposal to stop at Ambleside and climb Wansfell Pike had been unanimously rejected, "that we have been throughout this journey disgracefully remiss. We have gone to see nothing that we ought to have seen. We have never paid any attention to ancient ruins, or galleries of pictures, or celebrated monuments. We have not climbed a single mountain. We went past Woodstock without looking in at the gates—we did not even go to see the obelisk on Evesham Plain——"

"That was because some of you drove the horses the wrong way," it is remarked.

"Indeed, we have done nothing that we ought to have done."

"Perhaps, Madame," said the Lieutenant, "that is why the voyage has been so pleasant to us. One cannot always be instructing oneself, like a tourist."

If you wish to vex my Lady, call her a tourist. This subtle compliment of the Lieutenant pleased her immensely: but I confess myself unable to see in what respects we were not tourists, except that we were a little more ignorant, and indifferent to our ignorance, than holiday travellers generally are. What tourist, for example, would have done such a barbaric thing as go through Ambleside without stopping a day there?

That was all along of Bell, however, who insisted on our spending the treasure of our leisure time upon Grasmere; and who was strengthened in her demands by my Lady, when she came in view of a considerable number of tourists lounging about the former town. The poor men were for the most part dressed as mountaineers—otherwise they were quite harmless. They were loitering about the main thoroughfare of Ambleside, with their hands in the pockets of their knickerbockers, gazing in at a stationer's window, or regarding a brace of setters that a keeper standing in front of an hotel had in leash. They did not even look narrowly at the knees of our horses—an ordinary piece of polite impertinence. They were well-meaning and well-conducted persons; and the worst that could be said of them, that they were tourists, has been said about many good and respectable people. A man may have climbed Loughrigg Fell, and yet be an attentive husband and an affectionate father; while knickerbockers in themselves are not an indictable offence. My Lady made no answer to these humble representations; but asked for how long the horses would have to be put up before we started again.

Bell's enthusiasm of the morning had given way to something of disappointment, which she tried hard to conceal. Ambleside, one of the places she had been dreaming about for years, looked painfully modern now. In thinking about it, down in our southern home, she had shut out of the picture, hotels, shops, and fashionably-dressed people, and had dwelt only on the wild and picturesque features of a neighbourhood that had at one time been as familiar to her as her mother's face.

But now, Ambleside seemed to have grown big, and new, and strange; and she lost the sense of proprietorship which she had been exhibiting in our drive through the scenery of the morning. Then Loughrigg Fell did us an evil turn—gathering up all the clouds that the wind had driven over, and sending them gently and persistently down into the valley of the Rothay, so that a steady rain had set in. The Lieutenant did not care much how the sky might be clouded over, so long as Bell's face remained bright and happy; but it was quite evident she was disappointed, and he in vain attempted to reassure her by declaring that these two days had convinced him that the Lake country was the most beautiful in the world. She could not foresee then that this very gloom, that seemed to mean nothing but constant rain, would procure for us that evening by far the most impressive sight that we encountered during the whole of our long summer ramble.

Our discontent with Loughrigg Fell took an odd turn when it discharged itself upon the Duke of Wellington. We had grown accustomed to that foolish picture of the Waterloo Heroes, in which the Duke, in a pair of white pantaloons, stands in the attitude of a dancing-master, with an idiotic simper on his face. All along the road, in public-houses, inns, and hotels, we had met this desperate piece of decoration on the walls, and had only smiled a melancholy smile when we came upon another copy. But this particular print seemed to be quite offensively ridiculous. If Henry the Eighth had been inside these long white pantaloons and that tight coat, my Lady could not have regarded the figure with a severer contempt. We picked out enemies among the attendant generals, just as one goes over an album of photographs and has a curious pleasure in recording mental likes and dislikes produced by unknown faces. Somehow, all the Waterloo Heroes on this evening looked stupid and commonplace. It seemed a mercy that Napoleon was beaten; but how he had been beaten by such a series of gabies and nincompoops none of us could make out.

Then the Lieutenant must needs grumble at the

luncheon served up to us. It was a good enough luncheon, as hotels go; and even my Lady was moved to express her surprise that a young man who professed himself able to enjoy anything in the way of food, and who had told us amusing stories of his foraging adventures in campaigning time, should care whether there were or were not lemon and bread-crumbs with a mutton cutlet.

"Madame," said the Lieutenant, "that is very well in a campaign, and you are glad of anything; but there is no merit in eating badly-cooked food—none at all."

"A soldier should not mind such trifles," she said; but she smiled as though to say that she agreed with him all the same.

"Well, I think," said the young man, doggedly, "that is no shame that anyone should know what is good to eat, and that it is properly prepared. It is not any more contemptible than dressing yourself in good taste, which is a duty you owe to other people. You should see our old generals—who are very glad of some coarse bread, and a piece of sausage, and a tumbler of sour wine, when they are riding across a country in the war—how they study delicate things, and scientific cookery, and all that, in Berlin."

"And do you follow their example when you are at home?"

"Not always; I have not enough time. But when you come to my house in Berlin, Madame, you will see what luncheon you shall have."

"Can't you tell us about it now?" says Tita.

"Pray do," echoes Bell, after casting another reproachful glance at the rain out of doors.

The Lieutenant laughed; but seeing that the women were quite serious, he proceeded in a grave and solemn manner to instruct them in the art of preparing luncheon.

"First," said he, "you must have Russian black bread and French white bread cut into thin slices—but you do not use the black bread yet awhile; and you must

have some good Rhine wine, a little warmed if it is in the winter; some Bordeaux, a bottle of green Chartreuse, and some champagne, if there are ladies. Now, for the first, you take a slice of white bread, you put a little butter on it, very thin, and then you open a pot of Russian caviare, and you put that on the slice of bread three-quarters of an inch thick, not less than that. You must not taste it by little and little, as all English ladies do, but eat it boldly, and you will be grateful. Then half a glass of soft Rhine wine—if it is a good Marcobrunner, that is excellent. Then you eat one slice of the black bread, with butter on it, more thick than on the white bread. Then you have two, perhaps three, Norwegian anchovies——"

"Would you mind my writing these things down?" says my Lady.

The Lieutenant of course assents; she produces a small bunch of ivory tablets; and I know the horrible purpose that fills her mind as she proceeds to jot down this programme.

"You must have the caviare and the anchovies of real quality, or everything is spoiled. With the anchovies you may eat the black bread, or the white, but I think without butter. Then half a glass of Rhine wine——"

"Those half-glasses of Rhine wine are coming in rather often," remarks Bell.

"No, Mademoiselle, that is the last of the Rhine wine. Next is a thin slice of white bread, very thin butter, and a very thin slice of Bologna sausage. This is optional——"

"My dear," I say to Tita, "be sure you put down '*This is optional!*'"

"With it you have a glass of good and soft Bordeaux wine. Then, Madame, we come to the reindeer's tongue. This is the *pièce de résistance*, and your guests must eat of it just as they have their hour for dinner in the evening. Also, if they are ladies, they may prefer a sparkling wine to the Bordeaux, though the Bordeaux is much better. And this is the reason:—After the reindeer's tongue is taken away, and you may

eat an olive or two, then a *pâté de foie gras*—real from Strasburg——"

"Stop!" cries one of the party. "If I have any authority left, I forbid the addition to that disastrous catalogue of another single item! I will not suffer their introduction into the house! Away with them!"

"But, my dear friend," says the Lieutenant, "it is a good thing to accustom yourself to eat the meats of all countries—you know not where you may find yourself."

"Yes," says Bell gently, "one ought to learn to like caviare, lest one should be thrown on a desert island."

"And why not?" says the persistent young man. "You are thrown on a desert island—you catch a sturgeon—you take the roe, and you know how to make very good caviare——"

"But how about the half-glass of Rhine wine?" says my Lady.

"You cannot have everything in a desert island; but in a town, where you have time to study such things——"

"And where you can order coffins for half-past ten," it is suggested.

"——A good luncheon is a good thing."

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Bell, "the rain has ceased."

And so it had. While we had been contemplating that imaginary feast, and paying no attention to the changes out of doors, the clouds had gradually withdrawn themselves up the mountains, and the humid air showed no more slanting lines of rain. But still overhead there hung a heavy gloom; and along the wet woods, and on the troubled bosom of the lake, and up the slopes of the hills, there seemed to lie an ominous darkness. Should we reach Grasmere in safety? The Lieutenant had the horses put to with all speed; and presently Bell was taking us at a rapid pace into the wooded gorge that lies between Nab Scar and Loughrigg Fell, where the gathering twilight seemed to deepen with premonitions of a storm.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### AT NIGHT ON GRASMERE.

"Ye who have yearned
With too much passion, will here stay and pity,
For the mere sake of truth; as 'tis a ditty
Not of these days, but long ago 'twas told
By a cavern wind unto a forest old;
And then the forest told it in a dream
To a sleeping lake."

We drove into the solitude of this deep valley without uttering a word. How could we tell what the strange gloom and silence might portend? Far away up the misty and rounded slopes of Loughrigg the clouds lay heavy and thick, and over the masses of Rydal Fell, on the other side of the gorge, an ominous darkness brooded. Down here in the chasm the trees hung cold and limp in the humid air, crushed by the long rain. There was no sign of life abroad, only that we heard the rushing of the river Rothay in among the underwood in the channel of the stream. There was not even any motion in that wild and gloomy sky, that looked all the stranger that the storm-clouds did not move.

But as we drove on, it seemed to become less likely that the rain would set in again. The clouds had got banked up in great billows of vapour; and underneath them we could see, even in the twilight, the forms of the mountains with a strange distinctness. The green of the distant slopes up there grew more and more intense, strengthened as it was by long splashes of a deep purple where the slate was visible; then the heavy grey of the sky, weighing upon the summits of the hills.

But all this was as nothing to the wild and gloomy scene that met our view when we came in sight of Rydal Water. We scarcely knew the lake we had loved of old, in bright days, and in sunshine, and

blowing rain. Here, hidden away among reeds, lay a long stretch of dark slate-blue, with no streak of white along the shores, no ripple off the crags, to show that it was water. So perfect was the mirror-like surface, that it was impossible to say in the gathering gloom where the lake ended and the land began. The islands, the trees, the fields, and the green spaces of the hills, were as distinct below as above; and where the dark blue of the lake ran in among the reeds, no one could make out the line of the shore. It was a strange and impressive scene, this silent lake lying at the foot of the hills, and so calm and death-like that the motionless clouds of the sky lay without a tremor on the sheet of glass. This was not the Rydal Water we had been hoping to see, but a solitary and enchanted lake, struck silent and still by the awful calmness of the twilight and the presence of the lowering clouds.

We got down from the phaeton. The horses were allowed to walk quietly on, with Tita in charge, while we sauntered along the winding road, by the side of this sombre sheet of water. There was no more fear of rain. There was a firmness about the outlines of the clouds that became more marked as the dusk fell. But although the darkness was coming on apace, we did not hasten our steps much. When should we ever again see such a picture as this, the like of which Bell, familiar with the sights and sounds of the district from her childhood, had never seen before?

What I have written above conveys nothing of the impressive solemnity and majesty of this strange sight as we saw it; and indeed I had resolved, before entering the Lake district, to leave out of the jottings of a mere holiday traveller any mention of scenes which have become familiar to the world through the imperishable and unapproachable descriptions of the great masters who lived and wrote in these regions. But such jottings must be taken for what they are worth—the hasty record of hasty impressions; and how could our little party have such a vision vouchsafed to them without at least noting it down as an incident of their journey?

We walked on in the darkness. The slopes of Nab Scar had become invisible. Here and there a white cottage glimmered out from the roadside; and Bell knew the name of every one of them, and of the people who used to occupy them.

"How surprised some of our friends would be," she said to Tita, "if we were to call on them to-night, and walk in without saying a word."

"They would take you for a banshee," said my Lady, "on such an evening as this. Get up, Bell, and let us drive on. I am beginning to shiver—whether with fright or with cold, I don't know."

So we got into the phaeton again, and sent the horses forward. We drove along the broad road which skirts the reedy and shallow end of Rydal Water, and entered the valley of the stream which comes flowing through the trees from Grasmere. It was now almost dark; and the only sound we could hear was that of the stream plashing along its rocky bed. By and by, a glimmer of yellow light was observed in front; and Bell having announced that this was the Prince of Wales Hotel, we were soon within its comfortable precincts. In passing we had got a glimpse of a dark steel-grey lake lying amid grey mists and under sombre hills—that was all we knew as yet of Grasmere.

But about an hour afterwards, when we had dined, the Lieutenant came back from the window at which we had been standing for a minute or two, and said—

"Mademoiselle, I have a communication for you."

Mademoiselle looked up.

"If you will go to the window——"

Bell rose and went directly.

"I know," said my Lady, with a well-affected sigh. "The night has cleared up—there is starlight or moonlight, or something, and I suppose we shall have to go out in a boat to please these foolish young people. But I think you will be disappointed this time, Count von Rosen."

"Why, Madame?"

"This is a respectable hotel. Do you think they

would give you a boat? Now, if there was some old lady to be cajoled, I daresay you would succeed——"

"Oh, you do think we cannot get a boat, yes? I do not suppose there is any trouble about that, if only Mademoiselle cares about going on the lake. Perhaps she does not—but you must see how beautiful this lake is at present."

The idea of Bell not wishing to go out on Grasmere—at any hour of the night—so long as there was a yellow moon rising over the dusky heights of Silver Home! The girl was all in a flutter of delight when she returned from the window—anxious that we should all see Grasmere under these fine conditions, just as if Grasmere belonged to her. And the Lieutenant, having gone outside for a few minutes, returned with the information that a boat was waiting for us. There was no triumph in his face—no exultation; and it never occurred to anyone to ask whether this young Uhlan had secured the boat by throwing the owner of it into the lake. The women were quite satisfied to accept all the pleasant things he brought them, and never stopped to inquire by what tyrannical or disgraceful means the young Prussian had succeeded in his fell endeavours. But at all events he managed to keep out of the police-office.

As a matter of fact, the boat was not only waiting when Tita and Bell, having dressed for the purpose, came downstairs, but was supplied with all manner of nice cushions, plaids, rugs, and a guitar-case. The women showed a good deal of trepidation in stepping into the frail craft, which lay under the shadow of a small jetty; but once out in the open lake, we found sufficient light around us, and Bell, pulling her grey and woollen shawl more tightly around her, turned to look at the wonders of Grasmere, which she had not seen for many years.

It was a pleasant night. All the hills and woods on the other side of the lake seemed for the most part in a black shadow; but out here the moonlight dwelt calmly on the water, and lit up the wooded island

further down, and shone along the level shores. As we went out into the silent plain, the windows of the hotel grew smaller and smaller, until in the distance we could see them but as minute points of orange fire that glittered down on the black surface below. Then, in the perfect stillness of the night—as the measured sound of the rowlocks told of our progress, and the moonlight shone on the gleaming blades of the oars—we were all at once startled by a loud and hissing noise, that caused Tita to utter a slight cry of alarm.

We had run into a great bed of water-weeds, that was all—a tangled mass of water-lily leaves, with millions of straight horsetails rising from the shallow lake. We pushed on. The horsetails went down before the prow of the boat; but all around us the miniature forest remained erect. The moonlight sparkled on the ripples that we sent circling out through those perpendicular lines. And then the Lieutenant called out a note of warning, and Bell plunged her oars in the water just in time, for we had nearly run down two swans that were fast asleep in among the tall weeds.

We forsook this shallower end of the lake, and, with some more hissing of horsetails, pushed out and into the world of moonlight and still water; and then, as Tita took the oars, and just dipped them now and again to give us a sense of motion, Bell rested her guitar on her knee, and began to sing to us. What should she sing under the solitude of the hills, when all our laughter of dinner-time was over, and we were as silent as the lake itself? There was not even a breath of wind stirring; and it was in a very low voice, with something of a tremor in it, that Bell began to accompany the faint touching of the guitar.

"I've heard the lilting at our ewe-milking,"

—she sang, and her voice was so low and tremulous that Tita forgot to dip the oars into the water that she might listen to the girl—

"Lasses a lilting before the break o' day,
But now they are moaning on ilka green loaning—
The Flowers o' the Forest are a' wede away."

Had Grasmere ever listened to a more pathetic ballad, or to a tenderer voice? It was as well, perhaps, that the Lieutenant could not see Bell's face; for as she sang the last verse—

> "We hear nae mair lilting at our ewe-milking;
> Women and bairns are heartless and wae;
> Sighing and moaning on ilka green loaning—
> The Flowers o' the Forest are a' wede away,"

—there was a sort of indistinctness in her voice; and when the Lieutenant said that it was the finest English song that he had yet heard, and that the air was so very different from most of the old English tunes, she could not answer him for a minute or two.

But when she did answer him, fancy our astonishment!

"It isn't English," she said, with just a trace of contempt in her tone. "When did you find the English able to write a song or an air like that?"

"Grant me patience!" cries my Lady, with a fine theatrical appeal to the moonlight overhead. "This girl, because she was born in Westmoreland, claims the possession of everything north of the Trent."

"Are not you also English, Mademoiselle?" says the Lieutenant.

"I belong to the North Country," says Bell proudly; "and we are all the same race up here."

Now you should have seen how this cue was seized by the Lieutenant. The boy had about as much knowledge of the colonization of this country as most youths pick up at schools; but the manner in which he twisted it about to suit the wild and audacious statement that Bell had uttered was truly alarming. Before we knew where we were, we were plunged into the history of Strathclyde, and invited to consider the consistency of character that must have prevailed in the great Welsh kingdom that stretched from Dumbarton to Chester. We had also some pleasant little excursions into Bernicia and Deira, with abundance of proof that the Lowland Scotch speak the best English now going—a piece

of information which we accepted with meekness. We were treated to a recapitulation of the settlements of the Angles, together with a learned disquisition on the aims of Ida. This was all very well. It passed the time. Bell thought she was firmly established in her position. Her traditional reverence for the "North Country" and all its belongings had, it turned out, some definite historical justification. She had a right to claim the songs of the Lowland Scotch; was she not herself of that favoured race? At length, Queen Tita burst into a merry fit of laughter!

"I don't know what you mean to prove, Count von Rosen," she said; "you prove so much. At one time you insist that Bell is Scotch; at another time you show us that she must be Welsh, if all the people in Strathclyde were Welsh. But look at her, and what becomes of all the theories? There is no more English girl in all England than our Bell."

"That is no harm said of her," replied the Lieutenant. abandoning all his arguments at once.

"I suppose I am English," said Bell, obstinately, "but I am North-country English."

Nobody could dispute that; and doubtless the Lieutenant considered that Bell's division of this realm into districts mapped out in her imagination was of much more importance than the idle inquiries of historians into the German occupation of England. Then we pulled away over to the island, and round underneath the shadows of its firs, and back through the clear moonlight to the small jetty of the hotel. We entered the warm and comfortable building. The folks who had been dining had all gone into the drawing-room; but neither my Lady nor Bell seemed inclined to venture in among the strangers; and so we procured a private sitting-room, in which, by good luck, there was a piano.

The Lieutenant sat down.

"Madame," he said, "what shall I play to you? It is not since that I was at Twickenham I have

touched a piano—oh, that is very bad English, I know, but I cannot help it."

"Sing the *rataplan* song that Bell was humming the other day," said Tita. "You two shall sing it —you shall be the old sergeant, and Bell the daughter of the regiment."

"Yes, I can sing it," he said; "but to play it—that I cannot do. It is too fine for my thick fingers."

And so he gave way to Bell, who played the accompaniment dexterously enough, and sang with a will. You would have fancied that the camp was really her birthplace, and that she was determined to march with the foremost, as the good song says. The Lieutenant had not half the martial ardour of this girl, who was singing of fire and slaughter, of battle and sudden death, as though she had been the eldest daughter of one of the kings of her native Strathclyde. And then, when she had finished that performance, it needed only the least suggestion of the Lieutenant to get her to sing Maria's next song, "*Ciascun lo dice*," so that you would have thought she had the spirit of the whole regiment within her. It is not a proper song. The brave Eleventh was doubtless a very gallant regiment; but why should they have taught their daughter to glorify their frightening of landlords, their flirtations, their fierce flying hither and thither, like the famous Jäger that followed Holk? This is the regiment, Maria tells you, that fears nothing, but whom all men fear. This is the regiment beloved of women; for is not each soldier sure to become a Field-Marshal? The Lieutenant laughed at the warlike glow of her singing, but he was mightily pleased, for all that. She was fit to be a soldier's wife—this girl with the mantling colour in her cheek, and the brave voice and gallant mien. With colours in her cap, and a drum slung round her neck—with all the fathers of the regiment petting her, and proud of her, and ready to drive the soul out of the man who spoke a rude word to her—with her arch ways, and her frank bearing, and her loyal

and loving regard for the brave Eleventh—why, Bell, for the moment, was really Maria, and as bright and as fearless as any Maria that ever sang "*rataplan!*" Queen Tita was pleased too, but she was bound to play the part of the stately Marchioness. With an affectionate pat on the shoulder, she told Bell she mustn't sing any more of these soldier-songs; they were not improving songs. With which—just as if she had been ordered by the Marchioness to leave the brave Eleventh—Bell began to sing the plaintive and touching "*Convien partir.*" Perhaps we may have heard it better sung at Drury Lane. The song is known in Covent Garden. But if you had heard Bell sing it this night—with her lover sitting quite silent and embarrassed with a shamefaced pleasure, and with a glimmer of moonlight on Grasmere visible through the open window—you might have forgiven the girl for her mistakes.

A notion may have crossed my Lady's mind that it was very hard on Arthur that Bell should in his absence have been singing these soldier-songs with so much obvious enjoyment. Was it fair that this young Uhlan should flutter his martial scarlet and blue and gold before the girl's eyes, and dazzle her with romantic pictures of a soldier's life? What chance had the poor law-student, coming out from his dingy chambers in the Temple, with bewildered eyes, and pale face, and the funereal costume of the ordinary English youth? We know how girls are attracted by show, how their hearts are stirred by the passing of a regiment with music playing and colours flying. The padded uniform may enclose a nutshell sort of heart, and the gleaming helmet or the imposing busby may surmount the feeblest sort of brain that could with decency have been put within a human skull; but what of that? Each featherbed warrior who rides from Knightsbridge to Whitehall, and from Whitehall to Knightsbridge, is gifted with the glorious traditions of great armies and innumerable campaigns; and in a ball-room the ass in scarlet is a far more

attractive spectacle than the wise man in black. Perhaps Arthur was not the most striking example that might have been got to add point to the contrast; but if any such thoughts were running through Queen Tita's mind, you may be sure that her sympathies were awakened for a young man whose chances of marrying Bell were becoming more and more nebulous.

And then my Lady sat down to the piano, and condescended to play for us a few pieces, with a precision and a delicacy of fingering which were far removed from Bell's performances in that way. I suppose you young fellows who read this would have regarded with indifference the dark-eyed little matron who sat there and unravelled the intricacies of the most difficult music. You would have kept all your attention for the girl who stood beside her; and you would have preferred the wilder and less finished playing of Bell, simply because she had fine eyes, pretty hair, a wholesome English pleasantness and frankness, and a proud and gracious demeanour. But a few years hence you may come to know better. You may get to understand the value of the quiet and unobtrusive ways of a woman who can look after a household, and busy herself with manifold charities, and bring up her children well and scrupulously, and yet have a tender smile for the vagaries of young folks like yourselves. And then, if it is your excellent fortune to have with you so gentle and fearless and honest a companion—if your own life seems to be but the half of the broader and fuller existence that abides beneath your roof—you may do worse than go down on your knees and thank God who has blessed your house with the presence of a good wife and a good mother.

Tales shall not be told out of school. We may have sat a little late that night. We were harming no one by so doing, except ourselves; and if our health suffered by such late hours, we were prepared to let it suffer. For the fact was, we drifted into talk about our Surrey home; and now that seemed so far away—and

it seemed so long since we had been there—that the most ordinary details of our bygone life in the south had grown picturesque. And from that Tita began to recall the names of the people she had known in the Lake district, in the old time, when Bell was but a girl, running about the valleys and hill-sides like a young goat. That, too, carried us back a long way, until it seemed as if we had drifted into a new generation of things that knew nothing of the good old times that were. There was a trifle of regret imported into this conversation—why, no one could tell; but when we broke up for the night, Tita's face was rather saddened, and she did not follow Bell when the girl called to her to look at the beautiful night outside, where the rapidly-sinking moon had given place to a host of stars that twinkled over the black gulf of Grasmere.

It is no wonder that lovers love the starlight, and the infinite variety and beauty and silence of the strange darkness. But folks who have got beyond that period do not care so much to meet the mystery and the solemnity of the night. They may have experiences they would rather not recall. Who can tell what bitterness and grievous heart-wringing are associated with the wonderful peace and majesty of the throbbing midnight sky? The strong man, with all his strength fled from him, has gone out in his utter misery, and cried, "Oh, God, save my wife to me!" And the young mother, with her heart breaking, has looked up into the great abyss, and cried, "Oh, God, give me back my baby!" and all the answer they have had was the silence of the winds and the faint and distant glimmer of the stars. They do not care any more to meet the gaze of those sad, and calm, and impenetrable eyes.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

ARTHUR'S SONG.

"Along the grass sweet airs are blown
Our way this day in Spring.
Of all the songs that we have known,
Now which one shall we sing?
Not that, my love, ah no!—
Not this, my love? why, so!—
Yet both were ours, but hours will come and go.

"The branches cross above our eyes,
The skies are in a net:
And what's the thing beneath the skies
We two would most forget?
Not birth, my love, no no—
Not death, my love, no no.
The love once ours, but ours long hours ago."

We stood at the open window, my Lady, Bell, and I, with the calm lake lying before us as darkly blue as the heart of a bell-flower, and with the hills on the other side grown grey, and green, and hazy in the morning sunlight. Bell had brought us thither. The Lieutenant was outside, and we could hear him talking to some one, although he had no idea of our presence. Was it fair to steal a march on the young fellow, and seek to learn something of the method by which he became familiarly acquainted with every man, woman, and child we met on our journey? In such matters I look to Tita for guidance. If she says a certain thing is proper, it is proper. And at this moment she was standing just inside the curtains, listening, with a great amusement on her face, to the sounds which reached us from below.

"Ay, ah wur born in eighteen hunderd—that's a long time ago—a long time ago," said a quavering old voice, that was sometimes interrupted by a fit of asthmatic coughing; "and you don't remember the great comet—the comet of eighteen hunderd an' eleven! No! See that now! And ah wur a boy at that time; but I can

"THE GREAT COMET OF 1811." P. 328.

remember the great comet of eighteen hunderd an' eleven—I remember it well now—and ah wur born in eighteen hunderd. How long ago is that now?"

"Why, that's easily counted," said the Lieutenant; "that's seventy-one years ago. But you look as hale and as fresh as a man of forty."

"Seventy-one—ay, that it is—and you don't remember the comet of eighteen hunderd an' eleven?"

"No, I don't. But how have you kept your health and your colour all this time? That is the air of the mountains gives you this good health, I suppose."

"Lor bless ye, ah don't belong to these parts. No. Ah wur born in the New Forest, in eighteen hunderd—Ringwood, that's the place—that's in the New Forest, a long way from eear. Do you know Ringwood?"

"No."

"Nor Poole?"

"No."

"Lor bless ye! Never been to Poole! Do ye know Southampton?"

"No."

"Bless my soul! Never been to Poole? There now! And you don't know Southampton, where all the ships are?—ay, a famous sight o' ships, I can tell ye. And you've never been to Southampton—Lor bless ye, you ain't much of a traveller! But there now, ain't you a Frenchman?"

"No."

"Go along with you! Not a Frenchman? An' you don't know Poole? It's a big place, Poole, and ah reckon it's grown bigger now, for it's many a year ago since ah wur there. When ah wur a boy—that's many a year ago—for ah remember well the great comet, in eighteen hunderd an' eleven—you don't remember that? No! God bless my soul, you're only a boy yet—and ah wur born seventy year ago—and when ah went up to Lunnon, ah wur such a simple chap!"

We could hear the old man laughing and chuckling, until a fit of coughing seized him, and then he proceeded:—

"Ah wur taking a bridle down to my mahster, and what's the bridge you go over? Dear me, dear me! my memory isn't as good as it once was——"

And at this point the old man stopped, and puzzled, and hesitated about the name of the bridge, until the Lieutenant besought him never to mind that, but to go on with his story. But no. He would find out the name of the bridge; and after having repeated twenty times that he was born in 1800, and could remember the comet of 1811, he hit upon the name of Blackfriars.

"An' there wur a chap standin' there, as come up to me and asked me if I would buy a silk handkerchief from him. He had two of 'em—Lor bless ye, you don't know what rare good handkerchiefs we had then—white, you know, wi' blue spots on 'em—they're all gone out now, for it's many a year ago. And that chap he thought ah'd bin sellin' a oss; and he made up to me, and he took me into a small public-'ouse, close by, and says he, 'Ah'll be sworn a smart young fellow like you 'll 'ave a tidy bit o' money in your pocket.' An' ah wur a smart young fellow then, as he said, but, God bless you, that's many a year ago; an' now, would you believe it, that chap got five shillins out o' me for two of his handkerchiefs—he did indeed, as sure as I'm alive. Wasn't it a shame to take in a poor country chap as wur up doing a job for his mahster?"

"Five shillings for two silk handkerchiefs with blue spots?" said the Lieutenant. "Why, it was you who did swindle that poor man. It is you that should be ashamed. And you took away the bridle safe?"

"Ay, ah wur goin' down to Winchester. Do ye know Winchester?"

"No."

"Ha, ha, ha! Ah thought not! No, nor Poole? Have you ever been to Bristol—there now!"

"My dear friend, there are few men so great travellers as you have been. You should not boast of it."

"But, Lor bless ye, don't ye know the ships at Poole? And Winchester—that's a fine town, too, is

Winchester. Ah'd a month at Winchester when ah wur a young man."

"A month! What do you mean by that?"

"Yes, that ah did. Lor, they were far stricter then than they are now."

"But what was this month you are speaking about?"

"Don't ye know what a month in jail is for ketchin a rabbit?"

"Oh, it was a rabbit, was it?"

The wicked old man laughed and chuckled again.

'Ay," said he, "ah got one month for ketchin one rabbit, but if they'd 'ave gi'en me a month for every rabbit and hare as ah've ketched, Lor bless ye!—you young fellows now-a-days know nothin'! You're simple chaps, that's what it is! Have you ever heard of the great comet of eighteen hunderd an' eleven? There now! And the crowds as come out to see it—stretchin' out—long—jest as it might be the long gown as mothers put on young things when they're carried about—and that wur in eighteen 'underd an' eleven. But I'm gettin' old now, and stiff—and them rheumatics they do trouble one so when they come on bad in the night-time. I'm not what I was at your age—you'll be thirty now, or forty mayhap?"

"Nearer thirty."

"Ah never 'ad so much hair as you—it wur never the fashion to wear hair on the face at that time."

"And you followed the fashion, of course, when you were a young fellow, and went courting the girls. Yes?"

This hint seemed to wake up the old man into a high state of glee; and as he began to tell of his exploits in this direction, he introduced so many unnecessary ejaculations into his talk that my Lady somewhat hastily withdrew, dragging Bell with her. The old rogue outside might have been with our army in Flanders, to judge by the force of his conversation; and the stories that he told of his wild adventures in such distant regions as Poole and Southampton

showed that his memory treasured other recollections than that of the 1811 comet. How the conversation ended I do not know; but by and by Von Rosen came in to breakfast.

It is a shame for two women to have a secret understanding between them, and look as if they could scarcely keep from smiling, and puzzle a bashful young man by enigmatical questions.

"Madame," said the Lieutenant, at last, "I am very stupid. I cannot make out what you mean."

"And neither can she," observes one who hates to see a worthy young man bothered by two artful women. "Her joke is like the conundrum that was so good that the man who made it, after trying for two years and a half to find out what it meant, gave it up and cut his throat. Don't you heed them. Cut the salad, like a good fellow, and let Bell put in the oil, and the vinegar, and what not. Now, if that girl would only take out a patent for her salad-dressing, we should all be rolling in wealth directly."

"I should call it the Nebuchadnezzar," said Bell.

My Lady pretended not to hear that remark, but she was very angry; and all desire of teasing the Lieutenant had departed from her face, which was serious and reserved. Young people must not play pranks with Scripture names, in however innocent a fashion.

"It is a very good thing to have salad at breakfast," said the Lieutenant; "although it is not customary in your country. It is very fresh, very pleasant, very wholesome in the morning. Now, if one were to eat plenty of salad, and live in this good mountain air, one might live a long time——"

"One might live to remember the comet of eighteen 'underd an' eleven," observed Bell, with her eyes cast down.

The Lieutenant stared for a moment; and then he burst into a roar of laughter.

"I have discovered the joke," he cried. "It is that you did listen to that old man talking to me. Oh, he was a very wicked old person——"

And here, all at once, Von Rosen stopped. A great flush of red sprung to the young fellow's face—he was evidently contemplating with dismay the possibility of my Lady having overheard all the dragoon-language of the old man.

"We heard only up to a certain point," says Madame, sedately. "When he began to be excited, Bell and I withdrew."

The Lieutenant was greatly relieved. The septuagenarian was not a nice person for ladies to listen to. Indeed, in one direction he was amply qualified to have written a "*Dialogue between a Man and a Cat: being a discussion as to which would like to use the most bad language when the tail of the latter is trodden upon.*" Such an essay would be instructive in results, but objectionable in tone.

All this while we had heard nothing of Arthur. That morning when Tita sent down to inquire if there were any letters for us at the post-office and found there were none, she must needs send an urgent telegram to Twickenham, to see if the young man's parents knew anything of his whereabouts. Of course they could not possibly know. Doubtless he was on his way to Carlisle. Perhaps we should have the pleasure of meeting him in Edinburgh.

But this indefinite postponement of the coming of Arthur was a grievous irritation to the Lieutenant. It was no relief to him that his rival was disposed to remain absent. The very odd position in which he was now placed made him long for any result that would put an end to his suspense; and I think he was as anxious about seeing Arthur as any of us,—that is to say, presuming Arthur to be certain to come sooner or later. If it should happen that the dog-cart had been upset—but there is no use in speculating on the horrible selfishness that enters into the hearts of young men who are in love and jealous.

All these things and many more the young Prussian revealed to the sympathetic silence of Grasmere and the fair green mountains around, as he and I set out

for a long walk. The women had gone to pay visits in the village and its neighbourhood. It seemed a pity to waste so beautiful a day in going into a series of houses; but my Lady was inexorable whenever she established to her own satisfaction that she owed a certain duty.

The Lieutenant bade Bell good-bye with a certain sadness in his tone. He watched them go down the white road, in the glare of the sunshine, and then he turned with a listless air to set out on his pilgrimage into the hills. Of what avail was it that the lake out there shone a deep and calm blue under the clear sky, that the reflection of the wooded island was perfect as the perfect mirror, and that the far hills had drawn around them a thin tremulous veil of silver gauze under the strong heat of the sun? The freshness of the morning—when a light breeze blew over from the west, and stirred the reeds of the lake, and awoke a white ripple in by the shore—had no effect in brightening up his face. He was so busy talking of Bell, and of Arthur, and of my Lady, that it was with a serene unconsciousness he allowed himself to be led away from the lake into the lonely regions of the hills.

Even a hardy young Uhlan finds his breath precious when he is climbing a steep green slope, scrambling up shelves of loose earth and slate, and clinging on to bushes to help him in his ascent. There were interruptions in this flow of lovers' complainings. After nearly an hour's climbing, Von Rosen had walked and talked Bell out of his head; and as he threw himself on a slope of Rydal Fell, and pulled out a flask of sherry and his cigar-case, he laughed aloud, and said—

"No, I had no notion we were so high. Hee! that is a view—one does not see that often in my country—all houses and men swept away—you are alone in the world—and all around is nothing but mountains and lakes."

Indeed, there was away towards the south a network of hill and water that no one but Bell would have

picked to pieces for us—thin threads of silver lying in long valleys, and mounds upon mounds rising up into the clear blue sky that sloped down to the white line of the sea. Coniston we could make out, and Windermere we knew. Esthwaite we guessed at; but of what avail was guessing, when we came to that wild and beautiful panorama beyond and around?

The Lieutenant's eyes went back to Grasmere.

"How long is it you think Madame will pay her visits?"

"Till the afternoon, probably. They will lunch with some of their friends."

"And we—do we climb any more mountains?"

"This is not a mountain—it is a hill. We shall climb or go down again, just as you please."

"There is nothing else to do but to wait if we go down?"

"I suppose you mean waiting for the ladies to return—no; our going down won't bring them back a minute the sooner."

"Then—let us go on, anywhere."

We had a long, aimless, and devious wandering that day among the grassy slopes and peaks of Rydal Fell, until we at length came down by the gorge through which Rydal Beck plunges, foaming into the valley below. Wherever we went, the Lieutenant seemed chiefly to be concerned in making out the chief places of beauty which we should bring the women to see on the morrow—as if Bell did not know Rydal Beck and all its falls as well as she knew Walton Heath. And then we got down the winding road by Rydal Mount, and walked leisurely back by Rydal Water to Grasmere.

What was this that confronted us as we went into the hotel, and went forward to the large windows? The sun was lying brightly on the hills, and the lake, and the garden in front of us; and on the lawn—which was a blaze of bright colour—three figures stood, throwing jet-black shadows on the green. Von Rosen stared, as well he might stare. For there were Bell

and Tita, engaged in earnest and interesting talk with a young man; and the young man was Arthur.

For a second or two the Lieutenant did not utter a word; but presently he remarked, with a fine affectation of carelessness—

"Have they had lunch, do you think?"

"Let us go and see," I say; and so our Uhlan stalks gloomily out into the garden.

Our appearance seemed to cause great embarrassment to the party on the lawn. Arthur, with a flush on his face, greeted us stiffly; and then he suddenly turned to Queen Tita, and continued his talk with her in an ostentatiously impressive manner, as though he would give us to understand that he would take no more notice of us. Bell, apparently, had been rather left out in the cold. Perhaps she was a little vexed—for even the most amiable of girls have their notions of pride—and so what must she do but immediately turn to the Lieutenant and ask him with much friendliness all about his forenoon's ramble.

If thankfulness, and kindliness, and all the modest and grateful respect of love were ever written on a young man's face, they dwelt in the eyes of our Uhlan as he was almost struck dumb by this signal mark of Bell's condescension. He took no great advantage of the permission accorded to him. He did not seek to draw her away. In fact, after telling Mademoiselle, with his eyes cast down, that he hoped she would come next day to see all that we had seen, he placed the burden of explanation on me, who would rather have sat in the back benches and looked from a distance at this strange comedy.

But the effect upon Arthur of this harmless conduct of Bell's was what might have been expected. When we turned to go into the hotel for luncheon, he was talking in rather a loud way, with a fine assumption of cynicism. He had not much to tell of his adventures, for the reason of his coming up so late was merely that the cob had gone a little lame, and had been brought with some care to Kendal, where

it was to have a couple of days' rest—but his conversation took far wider sweeps than that. The climax of it came when we were sitting at table. All this time the lad had not addressed a word to Bell; but now he suddenly observed—

"You remember that song of Lover's you used to sing, about the white sails flowing?"

"Yes," said Bell—she had often sung it to him at his own request.

"It is a pretty song," said he, with rather a ghastly smile; "but I heard a version of it the other night that I thought was a good deal truer. Shall I try to repeat the verses?"

"Yes, do," says Queen Titania, with no great cordiality in her tone. She half anticipated what was coming.

"This is the first verse," said the young man, glancing rather nervously at Bell, and then instantly withdrawing his eyes:—

"What will you do, love, when I am going,
With white sails flowing, the seas beyond?
What will you do, love, when waves divide us,
And friends may chide us, for being fond?"

"When waves divide us, and friends are chiding,
Afar abiding, I'll think anew;
And I'll take another devoted lover.
And I'll kiss him as I kissed you."

A frightful silence prevailed. We all of us knew that the reckless young man was rushing on self-destruction. Could he have devised a more ingenious method of insulting Bell? He proceeded:—

"What will you do, love, if distant tidings
Thy fond confidings should undermine?
And I abiding 'neath sultry skies
Should think other eyes were as bright as thine?"

"Ah, joyful chance! If guilt or shame
Were round thy name, could I be true?
For I'd take the occasion, without much persuasion,
To have another flirtation—that's what I'd do."

If there are angels who watch over the fortunes of unhappy lovers, surely they must have wept at

this moment. These foolish verses—and another one which fear of my Lady prevents my publishing here—were the actual outcome of all the rebellious thoughts that had been rankling in his mind like poison during these last few days. Along the lonely highway, this was the devil's dirge he had been crooning to himself. He had fed on its unholy bitterness as he sat in remote inns, and pictured to himself, with a fierce satisfaction, the scene in which he would recite the lines to Bell, before the whole of us.

And now the deed was done. He sat silent for a moment; and we were all of us silent. A waiter said, "Sherry, sir?" behind his ear, and he started. And then Queen Tita turned to Von Rosen, and asked him if he had seen Rydal Mount.

It was a pitiable thing. In public life a man may force himself into the Chancellorship of the Exchequer, or some such office, by departing into a Cave of Adullam and marshalling the discontented around him; but in love affairs, how is a man to profit by an exhibition of angry passion and recklessness? Force is of no avail, threatening is as idle as the wind. And there was something even more cruel than threatening in this recitation of the young man's, as only those who were familiar with our life in Surrey could understand. What might come of it no one could tell.

[*Note by Queen Titania.*—"I am no judge of what ought to be placed before the public—I leave that to those whose sense of *good taste* and *proper feeling* is probably better than mine. But if these most *impertinent* verses are to be published, I have to say that the implication contained in the first verse is cruelly *false*. To hint that Bell could have thought of kissing either Arthur or the Lieutenant—or would have done so if they were *Princes of the Blood*—is most unjust and insulting to a girl whose pride and self-respect no one has ever dared to impeach. It is all very well for a stupid young man to say such things in a fit of *ungovernable rage;* but what I know is that Bell cried very much about it, when she spoke to me about it afterwards. And both my husband and Count von Rosen sat still, and never said a word. If *I* had been a man, I think I should have told Arthur very plainly what I thought of his *very pretty conduct*. But I suppose they considered it a jest; for I have frequently found that the notions of gentlemen about what is humorous are a *little peculiar*."]

## CHAPTER XXV.

### ARMAGEDDON.

"Let us go hence, my songs; she will not hear.
Let us go hence together without fear;
Keep silence now, for singing-time is over,
And over all old things and all things dear.
She loves not you nor me as all we love her.
Yea, though we sang as angels in her ear,
She would not hear."

BLOW, wind, and shriek, tempests! Let all the gases be lowered, and thunder roll through the gloom! Tremble, ye forests of canvas, where twisted oaks and shattered elms bear witness to the agony of the scene; and let the low music of the violoncello and the throbbing of muffled drums announce that dreadful deeds are brewing Alas! we had no such thrilling accompaniments to the tragedy being enacted before our eyes on the fair shores of Grasmere. The lake lay as blue and as calm as though no perplexed and suffering human souls were by its side; and instead of the appropriate darkness of a theatre, we had the far hills trembling under the white haze of the mid-day heat. Yet my Lady saw none of these things. Her heart was rent asunder by the troubles of the young folks under her charge: until I seemed to see in her speechless eyes a sort of despairing wish that she had never been born.

"And yet," I say to her, "you don't see the worst of it. If Arthur is driven away by Bell, a far more terrible thing will befall him."

"What?" says Queen Titania, with the clear, brown eyes grown solemn.

"He will marry somebody else."

"Bah!" she says peevishly; "is this the time to be thinking of jests?"

"Indeed, I know one who never discovered the joke of it. But don't you think that he will?"

"I wish he would."

"There's little Katty Tatham, now, would give her ears to marry him."

"You always fancy girls are very anxious to marry."

"I never asked but one, and I found her ready enough."

"I refused you."

"You made a pretence of doing so."

"I wish I had kept to my first resolution."

"I wish you had, since you say so. But that's of no consequence. I saved you from committing suicide, as I have frequently told you."

The small creature looks up, and with an excellent calmness and self-composure, says—

"I suppose you never heard of a young man—I thought him very silly at the time, myself—who walked about all night, one night at Eastbourne; and in the morning—long before my mamma was up—aroused the servants, and sent in a letter—a sort of ultimatum it was—with all sorts of vows of vengeance and despair. That young man wasn't Arthur Ashburton; but when you complain of Arthur's mad follies——"

"Madam," I say to her, "your sex protects you. Go and live. But when you say that *I* complain of Arthur, and in the next breath accuse me of always bringing forward excuses for him——"

But what was the use of continuing the argument? My Lady smiles with a fine air of triumph; confident that her ingenious logic had carried the day, as, in fact, it generally does. The man who endeavours to follow, seize, and confront the airy statements made by a lady in a difficulty, resembles nothing so much as a railway-train trying to catch a butterfly; and who would not back the butterfly?

We were now placed in an uncommonly awkward fix. The arrival of Arthur at Grasmere had produced a complication such as we had not dreamt of; for now it appeared as if the situation were to be permanent. We had somehow fancied that, as soon as he overtook us, some definite arrangement would be come to, settling at once and for ever those rival pretensions which were

interfering with our holiday in a serious manner. At last, my Lady had considered, the great problem was to be finally solved; and, of course, the solution lay in Bell's hands. But, now Arthur had come, who was to move in the matter? It was not for Bell, at all events, to come forward and say to one of the young men "Go!" and to the other "Stay!" Neither of them, on the other hand, seemed disposed to do anything bold and heroic in order to rid us of this grievous embarrassment; and so the first afternoon passed away—with some more walking, visiting, and boating—in a stolidly and hopelessly reserved and dreary fashion.

But every one of us knew that a mine lay close by, and that at any moment a match might be flung into it. Every word that was uttered was weighed beforehand. As for Tita, the poor little woman was growing quite pale and fatigued with her constant and nervous anxiety; until one of the party privately told her that if no one else asked Bell to marry, he would himself, and so end our troubles.

"I don't know what to do," she said, sitting down and folding her hands on her knees, while there was quite a pitiable expression on her face. "I am afraid to leave them for a moment. Perhaps now they may be fighting—but that does not much matter, for Bell can't have gone downstairs to dinner yet. Don't you think you could get Arthur to go away?"

"Of what use would that be? He went away before; and then we had our steps dogged, and letters and telegrams in every town. No; let us have it out here."

"I wish you and he would have it out between you. That poor girl is being frightened to death."

"Say but one brief word, my dear, and Arthur will be feeding the fishes among the reeds of Grasmere before the morning. But would you really like Bell to send Arthur off? Is he really to be told that she won't marry him? They used to be pets of yours. I have seen you regard them, as they walked before us along the

lanes, with an amiable and maternal smile. Is it all over? Would you like him to go away and never see us any more?"

"Oh, I don't know;" cries Tita, with the anxiety and pity and tenderness in her eyes almost grown into tears.

That was a nice little project of hers with which we had started from the old tavern in Holborn. It had been tolerably successful. If Bell were not in love with the Lieutenant, there could be no doubt, at least, that the Lieutenant was hopelessly and over head and ears in love with Bell. It was a pretty comedy for a time; and my Lady had derived an infinite pleasure and amusement from watching the small and scarcely perceptible degrees by which the young folks got drawn towards each other. What would have been the beautiful pictures of English scenery we had driven through, without two young lovers in the foreground, trying to read their fate in each other's eyes, and affording us elderly folks all manner of kindly and comic reminiscences?

It had all turned out very well; until, suddenly, came the revelation that the greatest happiness of the greatest number had demanded a human victim; and here he was before us, with gory locks and piteous eyes, demanding justice. Never before had my Lady fully realized what was meant in the final sending away of Arthur; and now that she saw before her all the consequences of her schemes, she was struck to the heart, and dared scarcely ask for some reassurance as to what she had done.

"Oh," she says, "I hope I have done right."

"You! Why should you assume any responsibility? Let the young folks arrange their own affairs as they like best. Do you think, if Bell had been willing to break with Arthur, that your packing off the Lieutenant to Germany would prevent her making the acquaintance of some other man? And she has not broken off with Arthur. If she does so, she does so, and there's an end of it; but why should you vex yourself about it?"

She was not to be comforted. She shook her head, and continued to sit there with her eyes full of anxious cares. When at length she went off to dress hastily for dinner, it was with a determination that from that moment she would endeavour to help Arthur in every way she could. That was the form her repentance took.

If the young man had only known that he had secured such a valuable ally! But just at this time —amid all our perplexity as to who should first precipitate matters what should the reckless fellow do but startle us all with a declaration which wholly altered the aspect of affairs!

We were seated at dinner. It was in the private room we had engaged; and the evening light, reflected from the lake outside, was shining upon Tita's gentle face as she sat at the head of the table. Bell was partly in shadow. The two young men, by some fatal mischance, sat next each other: probably because neither wished to take the unfair advantage offered by the empty seat next to Bell.

Well, something had occurred to stir up the smouldering fires of Arthur's wrath. He had been treated with great and even elaborate courtesy by everybody —but more particularly by Bell—during our afternoon rambles; but something had evidently gone wrong. There was a scowl on the fair and handsome face that was naturally pleasant, boyish, and agreeable in appearance. He maintained a strict silence for some little time after dinner was served; although my Lady strove to entice him into the general talk. But presently he looked up, and, addressing her, said in a forcedly merry way—

"Should you like to be startled?"

"*Yes, please,*" Tita would probably have said—so anxious is she to humour everybody; but just then he added, in the same reckless and defiant tone—

"What if I tell you I am going to get married?"

An awful consternation fell upon us.

"Oh," says my Lady, in a hurried fashion, "you are joking, Arthur."

"No, I am not. And when I present the young lady to you, you will recognize an old friend of yours, whom you haven't seen for years."

To put these words down on paper can give no idea whatever of the ghastly appearance of jocularity which accompanied them, nor of the perfectly stunning effect they produced. The women were appalled into silence. Von Rosen stared, and indifferently played with the stem of his wine-glass. For mere charity's sake, I was driven into filling up this horrible vacuum of silence; and so I asked—with what show of appropriateness married people may judge—whether he had formed any plans for the buying of furniture.

Furniture! 'Tis an excellent topic. Everybody can say something about it. My Lady, with a flash of gratitude in her inmost soul, seized upon the cue, and said—

"Oh, Arthur, have you seen our sideboard?"

Now, when a young man tells you he is about to get married, it is rather an odd thing to answer "*Oh, Arthur*—or Tom, or Dick, or Harry, as the case may be—*have you seen our sideboard?*" But all that my Lady wanted was to speak; for Arthur, having accomplished his intention of startling us, had relapsed into silence.

"Of course he has seen the sideboard," I say for him. "He was familiar with the whole of that fatal transaction."

"Why fatal?" says the Lieutenant.

You see, we were getting on.

"Bell will tell you the history. No? Then I will—for the benefit of all folks who may have to furnish a house; and I hope Arthur—after the very gratifying announcement he has just made—will take heed."

"Oh, yes," says Arthur, gaily, "let us have all your experience about house matters. It is never too soon to learn."

"Very well. There was once a sideboard which lived in Dorking——"

Here the Lieutenant begged to know what piece of furniture a sideboard was; and when that was explained to him, the legend was continued:—

"It was a very grand old sideboard of carved oak, which had regarded the dinner-parties of several generations from its recess. At last it had to be sold at public auction. A certain agreeable and amiable lady, who lives on the banks of the river Mole, saw this sideboard, and was told she might have it for a trifle of ninety-five guineas. She is an impressionable person. The sideboard occupied her thoughts day and night; until at last her husband—who is the most obliging person in the world, and has no other desire in life than to obey her wishes——"

Here there were some interruptions at the further end of the table. Silence having been restored, the speaker went on to say that the sideboard was bought.

"It was the beginning of the troubles of that wretched man. When you have an old oak sideboard that farmers' wives will drive twenty miles to look at, you must have old oak chairs. When you have old oak chairs, a microcephalous idiot would know that you must have an old oak table. By slow degrees the home of this unhappy man underwent transformation. Rooms that had been familiar to him, and homely, became gloomy halls from which ghosts of a cheerful temperament would have fled in despair. People came to dinner, and sat in the high-backed chairs with an expression of resigned melancholy on their faces; and now and again an unlucky lady of weight and dimensions would, on trying to rise from the table, tilt up the chair and save herself from falling by clinging to the arm of the man next her. For of course you can't have castors on old oak chairs, and when the stumps of wood have got well settled into the thick Turkey carpet, how is the chair to be sent back?"

"That is quite absurd," says a voice. "Everyone says our dining-room chairs are exceedingly comfortable."

"Yours are; but this is another matter. Now the lady of the house did not stop at oak furniture and solemn carpets and severe curtains. She began to dress herself and her children to match her furniture. She cut the hair of her own babes to suit that sideboard. There was nothing heard of but broad lace collars, and black velvet garments, and what not; so that the boys might correspond with the curtains and not be wholly out of keeping with the chairs. She made a dress for her own mother, which that estimable lady contemplated with profound indignation, and asked how she could be expected to appear in decent society in a costume only fit for a fancy ball."

"It was a most beautiful dress, wasn't it, Bell?" says a voice.

"But far worse was to come. She began to acquire a taste for everything that was old and marvellous. She kept her husband for hours stifling in the clammy atmosphere of Soho, while she ransacked dirty shops for scraps of crockery that were dear in proportion to their ugliness. During these hours of waiting he thought of many things—suicide among the number. But what he chiefly ruminated on was the pleasing and ingenious theory that in decoration everything that is old is genuine, and everything that is new is meretricious. He was not a person of profound accomplishments——"

"Hear, hear!" says a voice.

——"and so he could not understand why he should respect the intentions of artists who, a couple of centuries ago, painted fans, and painted them badly, and why he should treat with scorn the intentions of artists who at this moment paint fans and paint them well. He could not acquire any contempt for a French vase in gold and white and rose-colour, even when it was put beside a vase some three hundred years of age which was chiefly conspicuous by its defective curves and bad colour. As for Italian mirrors and blue and white china, he received without emotion the state-

ment that all the world of London was wildly running after these things. He bore meekly the contemptuous pity bestowed on him when he expressed the belief that modern Venetian glass was, on the whole, a good deal more beautiful than any he had seen of the old, and when he proposed to buy some of it as being more within the means of an ordinary person. But when at last—after having waited a mortal hour in a dingy hole in a dingy thoroughfare near Leicester Square—he was goaded into rebellion, and declared that he did not care a brass farthing, nor even the half of that sum, when an object of art was made, how it was made, where it was made, or by whom it was made, so long as it fulfilled its first duty of being good in design and workmanship and agreeable to the eye—it seemed to him that the end of his conjugal happiness was reached. Nothing short of a legal separation could satisfy the injured feelings of his wife. That she should have to live with this Goth and outer barbarian seemed to her monstrous. But at this time it occurred to her that she might find some use for even such a creature, considering that he was still possessed of a little money——"

"You seldom omit to bring that forward," says the voice.

——" and that there was a drawing-room to be transformed. Then he beheld strange things. Phantom curtains of black and gold began to steal into the house. Hidden mysteries dwelt in the black, yellow, and red of the carpet; and visitors paused upon the threshold for a moment to collect their wits, after the first stun of looking in. Then all the oil of Greenland was unable to light up this gloomy chamber in the evening; and so there came down from London mighty sheets of mirrors to be let into the walls. 'Now,' said this reckless woman to her husband, 'we must have a whole series of dinner-parties to ask everybody to come and see what the house looks like.'"

"Oh, what a story!" cries that voice again. "Bell, did you ever hear the like of that? I wonder he

does not say we put the prices on the furniture and invited the people to look at the cost. You don't believe it, do you, Count von Rosen?"

"No, Madame," said the Lieutenant; "I do not believe any lady exists such as that one which he describes."

"But he means me," says Tita.

"Then what shall I say?" continues the young man. "May I say that I have never seen—not in England, not in Germany—any rooms so beautifully arranged in the colours as yours? And it was all your own design? Ha!—I know he is calling attention to that for the purpose of complimenting you—that is it."

Of course, that mean-spirited young man took every opportunity of flattering and cajoling Bell's chief adviser; but what if he had known at this moment that she had gone over to the enemy, and mentally vowed to help Arthur by every means in her power?

She could not do much for him that evening. After dinner we had a little music, but there was not much life or soul in it. Arthur could sing an ordinary drawing-room song as well as another, and we half expected him to reveal his sorrows in that way, but he coldly refused. The Lieutenant, at my Lady's urgent request, sat down to the piano and sang the song that tells of the maiden who lived "im Winkel am Thore;" but there was an absence of that spontaneity which generally characterized his rough and ready efforts in music, and after missing two of the verses, he got over his task with an air of relief. It was very hard that the duty of dispelling the gloom should have been thrown on Bell; but when once she sat down and struck one or two of those minor chords which presaged one of the old ballads, we found a great refuge from our embarrassment. We were in another world then—with Chloe plaiting flowers in her hair, and Robin hunting in the greenwood with his fair lady, who was such a skilful archer, and all the lasses and lads kissing each

other round the Maypole. With what a fine innocence Bell sang of these merry goings-on! I daresay a good many well-conducted young persons would have stopped with the stopping of the dancing, and never told what happened after the fiddler had played "Packington's Pound" and "Sellinger's Round." But our Bell, with no thought of harm, went merrily on—

"Then after an hour
They went to a bower,
And played for ale and cakes,
And kisses too—
Until they were due
The lasses held the stakes.
The girls did then begin
To quarrel with the men,
And bid them take their kisses back
And give them their own again!"

In fact, there was a very bright smile of amusement on her face, and you could have fancied that her singing was on the point of breaking into laughter; for how could the girl know that my Lady was looking rather reserved at the mention of that peculiar sort of betting? But then the concluding verse comes back to the realms of propriety; and Bell sang it quite gently and tenderly, as though she, too, were bidding good-bye to her companions in a frolic:—

"'Good night,' says Harry;
'Good night,' says Mary;
'Good night,' says Dolly to John;
'Good night,' says Sue
To her sweetheart Hugh;
'Good night,' says every one.
Some walked, and some did run,
Some loitered on the way,
And bound themselves by kisses twelve
To meet next holiday—
And bound themselves by kisses twelve
To meet next holiday!"

"Mademoiselle," said Von Rosen, coming forward to her with quite a paternal air, "you must not sing any more to-night. You are always too ready to sing for us —and you do not reflect of the fatigue." And as Bell

stood rather embarrassed by this exhibition of thoughtfulness, and as Arthur glowered gloomily out from his corner, the Lieutenant made some excuse for himself and me, and presently we found ourselves out by the shores of the lake, smoking a contemplative cigar under the clear starlight.

"Now, my good friend," he said, suddenly, "tell me —is it a lie, yes?"

"Is what a lie?"

"That foolish story that he will be married."

"Oh, you mean Arthur. I had almost forgotten what he said at dinner. Well, perhaps it is a lie—young men in love are always telling lies about something or other."

"Heh!" says the Lieutenant, peevishly; "you do know it is not true. How can it be true?"

"Of course you want me to say that I think it true—you boys are so unreasonable. I don't know anything about it. I don't care. If he wants to marry some girl or other, I hope he may. The wish is perhaps not very friendly——"

"Now look at this!" says the Lieutenant, quite fiercely, and in a voice so loud that I was afraid it might reach the windows of the hotel that were now sending a yellow light over the lawn: "if he means to marry some other young lady, why is he here? He has no business here. Why does he come here to annoy everyone and make himself miserable? He ought to go away; and it is you that should send him away."

"Bless me! Surely a man may come and stop at an hotel at Grasmere without asking my permission. I have no right to forbid Arthur remaining in Westmoreland or any other county. He does not ask me to pay his bills."

"This that Madame says it is quite true, then," says the Lieutenant, angrily, "that you care only for your own comfort!"

"When Madame says such things, my good friend, she retains the copyright. Don't let her hear you repeating them, if you are wise, or you'll get into trouble. As for

myself, this cigar is excellent, and you may let your vexation take any shape that is handy. I foresaw that we should soon have two Arthurs in the field."

The tall young soldier walked up and down for a minute or two, evidently in great distress, and at last he stopped, and said, in a very humble voice—

"My dear friend, I beg your pardon. I do not know what I say when I see this pitiful fellow causing so much pain to your wife and to Mademoiselle. Now, when you look at them—not at me at all—will not you endeavour to do something?"

He was no great hand at diplomacy, this perplexed and stammering Uhlan, who seemed bent on inflicting his anger on his cigar. To introduce the spectacle of two suffering women so as to secure the banishment of his rival was a very transparent device, and might have provoked laughter, but that Grasmere is deep, and a young man in love exceedingly irritable.

"He says he is going to marry some other girl: what more would you like? You don't want to carry off all his sweethearts from the unfortunate youth?"

"But it is not true."

"Very well."

"And you talk of carrying off his sweetheart. Mademoiselle was never his sweetheart, I can assure you of that; and besides I have not carried her off, nor am likely to do that, so long as this wretched fellow hangs about, and troubles her much with his complainings. Now, if she will only say to me that I may send him away, I will give you my word he is not in this part of the country, no, not one day longer."

"Take care. You can't commit murder in this country with impunity, except in one direction. You may dispose of your wife as you please; but if you murder any reasonable being, you will suffer."

Indeed, the Lieutenant, pacing up and down the narrow path by the lake, looked really as if he would have liked to catch Arthur up and dash him against Mercator's Projection, or some other natural pheno-

menon ; and the more he contemplated his own helplessness in the matter, the more he chafed and fumed. The moon rose slowly from behind the hills, and ran along the smooth surface of the lake, and found him nursing this volcano of wrath in his breast. But suddenly, as he looked up, he saw the blind of one of the hotel-windows thrust aside, and he knew that Bell was there, contemplating the wonderful beauties of the sky. He ceased his growlings. A more human expression came over his face ; and then he proposed that we should go in, lest the ladies should want to say good-night.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE LAST OF GRASMERE.

"Muss aus dem Thal jetzt scheiden,
Wo alles Lust und Klang ;
Das ist mein herbstes Leiden,
Mein letzter Gang !
Dich, mein stilles Thal,
Grüss' ich tausend Mal !
Das ist mein herbstes Leiden,
Mein letzter Gang !"

A STILL greater surprise was in store for us next morning. My Lady had taken leave to discredit altogether the story of Arthur's approaching marriage. She regarded it as merely the wild and reckless utterance of vexation. For the young man's sake, she hoped that no one would make any allusion to this topic, and that he himself would allow it to fall into the rapidly running waters of oblivion.

Now, he had on the previous day despatched a message to Kendal to the effect that the dog-cart should be at once sent to him, if the cob had quite recovered. He proposed to accompany us as far as Penrith or Carlisle ; further than that he said he did not care to go. But as the trap was likely to arrive that forenoon, and as he had to see the man who would bring it, he begged us to start for our forenoon's walk by our-

selves—a proposal which was accepted with equanimity by the whole of our party. The young man was quite complaisant. My Lady was very attentive to him; and we thought we should start for our ramble with the consciousness that we had left behind us no wretched creature eating away his heart with thoughts of revenge.

Somehow this mood passed rapidly away from him. The spectacle of Bell and the Lieutenant planning with a great joy the outline of our morning excursion seemed to bring back all the bitterness of his spirit. He was silent for a long time—until, indeed, we were ready to leave the hotel; and then, as he accompanied us to the door, he produced a letter, and said, with an affectation of carelessness—

"By the way, I have a message for you. It was lucky I thought of going round to the post-office this morning, or I should have probably missed this. Katty Tatham desires to be remembered to you all, and hopes you will bring her back a piece of Scotch heather to show that you went all the way. Ta-ta!"

He waved his hand to us, and went in. My Lady looked at me solemnly, and said nothing for a moment, until Bell had passed along the road a little bit, with the Lieutenant.

"Is that another story, do you think? Do you believe that Katty Tatham is actually in correspondence with him?"

"He did not say so."

"He meant that we should infer it, at all events; and that, after what he said last night——"

Tita was dreadfully puzzled. She could understand how vexation of spirit might drive a foolish young man into making a statement not wholly in accordance with fact; but that he should repeat this legend in another way, and bring the name of a lady into it——no, Tita could scarcely believe that all this was untrue.

She hurried up to Bell, and placed her hand within the young lady's arm.

"Is it not strange that Katty Tatham should be writing to Arthur, if that was what he meant."

"Oh no, not at all. They are very old friends; and, besides, she does all the letter-writing for her papa, who is almost blind, poor old man. And what a nice girl she is, isn't she, Tita?"

Of course we were all anxious to persuade each other that Katty Tatham was the very nicest girl in all England, although none of us except Bell had seen her for two or three years; and it was wonderful how this sort of talk brightened up the spirits of our party. The Lieutenant grew quite interested in Katty Tatham. He was nearly praising her himself, although he had never heard her name until that moment. In short, the four of us were ready to swear that this poor little Katty was just as pleasant and honest and pretty and charming a girl as was to be found anywhere in the world, or out of it, and that it was most singular that she had never married. Tita declared that she knew that Katty had had ever so many offers; and that it was not alone the frailties of her father that kept her from marrying.

"She must have been waiting for some one," said the small woman, rather slyly.

What a morning it was! As we walked along the white road, in the stillness of the heat, the blue waters of Grasmere glimmered through the trees. Never had we seen the colours of Bell's Fairyland so intense. The hills in the distance had a silvery haze thrown over their pale purples, but here around us the sharp clear colours blazed in the sunshine—the deep blue of Grasmere, the yellow-white of the road, and the various rich greens and browns of the trees and the shore. And then, by and by, we came in sight of Rydal Water. How different it was to the weird and gloomy lake we had found two evenings before lying buried between the hills. Now it seemed shallow and fair and light, with a grey shimmer of wind across its surface, breaking here and there the perfect mirror of the mountain-slopes and woods. In the absolute silence around us we could hear the water-hens calling to each other; and out there among the reeds we could see

them paddling about, dipping their heads into the lake, and fluttering their wings. We walked on to Rydal bridge, and had a look at the clear brown rivulet rushing down its narrow channel between the thick underwood and the trees. We took the Lieutenant up to Rydal Mount—the small house with its tree-fuchsias standing bright and warm in the sunshine—and from the plateau in front beheld the great fair landscape around the silver-white lake of Windermere. We went up to the falls of Rydal Beck, and, in short, went the round of the ordinary tourist—all for the sake of our Prussian friend, we persuaded ourselves. Bell was his guide, and he looked as though he would have liked to be led for ever. Perhaps he took away with him but a confused recollection of all the interesting things she told him; but surely, if the young man has a memory, he cannot even now have forgotten that bright, clear, warm day that was spent about Rydal, with a certain figure in the foreground that would have lent a strange and gracious charm to a far less beautiful picture.

"Is it not an odd thing," I say to Queen Titania, who has been pulling and plaiting wild-flowers in order to let the young folks get ahead of us, "how you associate certain groups of unheeding trees and streams and hills with various events in your life, and can never get over the impression that they wear such and such a look?"

"I daresay it's quite true, but I don't understand,' she says, with the calm impertinence that distinguishes her.

"If you will cease for a moment to destroy your gloves by pulling these weeds, I will tell you a story which will convey my meaning to your small intellect."

"Oh, a story," she says, with a beautiful sigh of resignation.

"There was a young lady once upon a time who was about to leave England and go with her mamma to live in the south-west of France. They did not expect to come back for a good number of years, if ever they came

back. And so a young man of their acquaintance got up a farewell banquet at Richmond, and several friends came down to the hotel. They sat in a room overlooking the windings of the river, and the soft masses of foliage, and the far landscape stretching on to Windsor. The young man had, a little time before, asked the young lady to marry him, and she refused; but he bore her no malice——"

"He has taken care to have his revenge since," says Tita.

"You interrupt the story. They sat down to dinner on this summer evening. Everyone was delighted with the view; but to this wretched youth it seemed as though the landscape were drowned in sadness, and the river a river of unutterable grief. All the trees seemed to be saying good-bye, and when the sun went down, it was as though it would never light up any other day with the light of bygone days. The mist came over the trees. The evening fell, slow, and sad, and grey. Down by the stream a single window was lit up, and that made the melancholy of the picture even more painful, until the young man, who had eaten nothing and drank nothing, and talked to people as though he were in a dream, felt as if all the world had grown desolate, and was no more worth having——"

"If I had only known," says Tita, in a voice so low and gentle that you could scarcely have heard it.

"And then, you know, the carriages came round; and he saw her, with the others, come downstairs prepared to leave. He bade good-night to the mamma, who got into the carriage. He bade good-night to her; and she was about to get in too, when she suddenly remembered that she had left some flowers in the dining-room, and ran back to fetch them. Before he could overtake her she had got the flowers and was coming back through the passage into the hall. 'It isn't good-night, it is good-bye, we must say'—I think he said something like that—and she held out her hand—and somehow there was a very strange look in her eyes, just as if she were going to cry——. But,

you know, there's no use in your crying just now about it."

Tita is pretending to smile, but a certain tremor of the lips is visible; and so the narrator hurries on:—

"Now look here. For the next three months—for the soft-hearted creature had hurriedly whispered that she might return to England then—that young man haunted Richmond. He pretty nearly ruined his prospects in life, and his digestion as well, by continual and solitary dining at the Star and Garter. He could have kissed the stone steps of that hotel, and never entered its vestibule without blessing the white pillars and blank walls. He spent hours in writing letters there——"

"So that the Biarritz boatmen wondered why so many envelopes should have the Richmond postmark," says Tita—though how she could have learnt anything about it goodness only knows.

——"and haled out every complaisant friend he could lay hands on to moon about the neighbourhood. But the strange thing is this—that while he was in love with the vestibule of the hotel, he never saw the twilight fall over the Richmond woods without feeling a cold hand laid on his heart; and when he thinks of the place now—with the mists coming over the trees and the river getting dark—he thinks that the view from Richmond-hill is the most melancholy in all the world."

"And what does he think of Eastbourne?"

"That is a very different thing. He and she got into the quarrelling stage there——"

"In which they have successfully remained to the present time."

"But when she was young and innocent, she would always admit that she had begun the quarrel."

"On the contrary, she told stories in order to please him."

"That motive does not much control her actions now-a-days, at all events."

Here Tita would probably have delivered a crushing reply, but that Bell came up and said—

"What! you two children fighting again! What is it all about? Let me be umpire."

"He says that there is more red in the Scotch daisies than in the English daisies," says Tita, calmly. It was well done. Yet you should hear her lecture her two boys on the enormity of telling a fib.

How sad Bell was to leave the beautiful valley in which we had spent this happy time! Arthur had got his dog-cart; and when the phaeton was brought round, the Major's cob was also put-to, and both vehicles stood at the door. We took a last look at Grasmere. "Dich, mein stilles Thal!" said Bell, with a smile; and the Lieutenant looked quite shamefaced with pleasure to hear her quote his favourite song. Arthur did not so well like the introduction of those few words. He said, with a certain air of indifference—

"Can I give anybody a seat in the dog-cart? It would be a change."

"Oh, thank you: I should like so much to go with you, Arthur," says Tita.

Did you ever see the like of it! The woman has no more notion of considering her own comfort than if she had the hide of an alligator, instead of being, as she is, about the most sensitive creature in the world. However, it is well for her—if she will permit me to say so—that she has people around her who are not quite so impulsively generous; and on this occasion it was obviously necessary to save her from being tortured by the fractious complainings of this young man, whom she would have sympathized with and consoled if the effort had cost her her life.

"No," I say. "That won't do. We have got some stiff hills to climb presently, and some one must remain in the phaeton while the others walk. Now, who looks best in the front of the phaeton?"

"Mamma, of course," says Bell, as if she had discovered a conundrum; and so the matter was settled in a twinkling.

I think it would have been more courteous for Arthur to have given the phaeton precedence, considering who

was driving it; but he was so anxious to show off the paces of Major Quinet's cob, that on starting he gave the animal a touch of the whip that made the light and high vehicle spring forward in a surprising manner.

"Young man, reflect that you are driving the father of a family," I say to him.

Nevertheless, he went through the village of Grasmere at a considerable rate of speed; and when we got well up into the road which goes by the side of the Rothay into the region of the hills, we found that we had left Tita and her company far behind. Then he began to walk the cob.

"Look here!" he said, quite fiercely; "is Bell going to marry that German fellow?"

"How do I know?" I answer, astonished by the young man's impudence.

"You ought to know. You are her guardian. You are responsible for her——"

"To you?"

"No, not to me; but to your own conscience; and I think the way in which you have entrapped her into making the acquaintance of this man, of whom she knows nothing, doesn't look very well. I may as well say it when I think it. You ought to have known that a girl at her age is ready to be pleased with any novelty; and to draw her away from her old friends—I suppose you can explain it all to your own satisfaction—but I confess that to me——"

I let the young man rave. He went on in this fashion for some little time, getting momentarily more reckless and vehement and absurd in his statements. If Tita had only known what she had escaped!

"But after all," I say to him, when the waters of this deluge of rhetoric had abated, "what does it matter to you? We have allowed Bell to do just as she pleased; and perhaps, for all we know, she may regard Count von Rosen with favour, although she has never intimated such a thing. But what does it matter to you? You say you are going to get married."

"So I shall!" he said, with an unnecessary amount of emphasis.

"Katty Tatham is a very nice girl."

"I should think so! There's no coquetry about her, or that sort of vanity that is anxious to receive flattery from every sort of stranger that is seen in the street——"

"You don't mean to say that that is the impression you have formed of Bell?"

And here all his violence and determination broke down. In a tone of absolute despair he confessed that he was beside himself, and did not know what to do. What should he do? Ought he to implore Bell to promise to marry him? Or should he leave her to her own ways, and go and seek a solution of his difficulties in marrying this pretty little girl down in Sussex, who would make him a good wife and teach him to forget all the sufferings he had gone through? The wretched young fellow was really in a bad way; and there were actually tears in his eyes when he said that several times of late he had wished he had the courage to drown himself.

To tell a young man in this state that there is no woman in the world worth making such a fuss about, is useless. He rejects with scorn the cruel counsels offered by middle age; and sees in them only taunts and insults. Moreover, he accuses middle age of not believing in its own maxims of worldly prudence; and sometimes that is the case.

"At all events," I say to him, "you are unjust to Bell in going on in this wild way. She is not a coquette, nor vain, nor heartless; and if you have anything to complain of, or anything to ask from her, why not go direct to herself, instead of indulging in frantic suspicions and accusations?"

"But—but I cannot," he said. "It drives me mad to see her talking to that man. If I were to begin to speak to her of all this, I am afraid matters would be made worse."

"Well, take your own course. Neither my wife

nor myself have anything to do with it. Arrange it among yourselves; only, for goodness' sake, leave the women a little peace."

"Do you think *I* mean to trouble them?" he says, firing up. "You will see."

What deep significance lay in these words was not inquired into, for we had now to descend from the dog-cart. Far behind us we saw that Bell and Count von Rosen were already walking by the side of the phaeton, and Tita talking to them from her lofty seat. We waited for them until they came up, and then we proceeded to climb the steep road that leads up and along the slopes of the mighty Helvellyn.

"Mademoiselle," said the Lieutenant, "who is it will say that there is much rain in your native country? Or did you alarm us so as to make this surprise all the better, yes?"

Indeed, there was scarcely a flake of white in all the blue overhead; and, on the other side of the great valley, the masses of the Wythburn and Borrodaile Fells showed their various hues and tints so that you could almost have fancied them transparent clouds. Then the road descended, and we got down to the solitary shores of Thirlmere, the most Scotch-looking, perhaps, of the English lakes. Here the slopes of the hills are more abrupt, houses are few and far between, there is an aspect of remoteness and a perfect silence reigning over the still water, and the peaks of mountains that you see beyond are more jagged and blue than the rounded hills about Windermere. From the shores of Thirlmere the road again rises, until, when you come to the crest of the height, you find the leaden-coloured lake lying sheer below you, and only a little stone wall guarding the edge of the precipitous slope. We rested the horses here. Bell began to pull them handfuls of Dutch clover and grass. The Lieutenant talked to my Lady about the wonders of mountainous countries as they appeared to people who had been bred in the plains. Arthur looked over the stone wall down into the great valley; and was he thinking, I

wonder, whether the safest refuge from all his troubles might not be that low-lying and silent gulf of water that seemed to be miles beneath him?

When we were about to start again, the Lieutenant says to Arthur—

"If you are tired of driving the dog-cart, you might come into the phaeton, and I will drive your horse on to Keswick."

Who prompted him to make such an offer? Not himself, surely. I had formed a tolerable opinion of his good-nature; but the impatient and fretful manner in which he had of late been talking about Arthur rendered it highly improbable that this suggestion was his own. What did Bell's downcast look mean?

"Thank you, I prefer the dog-cart," said Arthur coldly.

"Oh, Arthur," says Bell, "you've no idea how steep the hill is, going down to Keswick, and in a dog-cart too——"

"I suppose," says the young man, "that I can drive a dog-cart down a hill as well as anybody else."

"At all events," says the Lieutenant, with something of a frown, "you need not address Mademoiselle as if that she did you harm in trying to prevent your breaking your neck."

This was getting serious; so that there was nothing for it but to bundle the boy into his dog-cart and order the Lieutenant to change places with my Lady. As for the writer of these pages—the emotions he experienced while a mad young fellow was driving him in a light and high dog-cart down the unconscionable hill that lies above Keswick, he will not attempt to describe. There are occurrences in life which it is better to forget; but if ever he was tempted to evoke maledictions on the hotheadedness, and bad temper, and general insanity of boys in love——Enough! We got down to Keswick in safety.

Now we had got among the tourists, and no mistake. The hotel was all alive with elderly ladies, who betrayed an astonishing acquaintance with the names of the mountains, and apportioned them off for successive days

as if they were dishes for luncheon and dinner. The landlord undertook to get us beds somewhere, if only we would come into his coffee-room, which was also a drawing-room, and had a piano in it. He was a portly and communicative person, with a certain magnificence of manner which was impressive. He betrayed quite a paternal interest in Tita, and calmly and loftily soothed her anxious fears. Indeed, his assurances pleased us much, and we began rather to like him; although the Lieutenant privately remarked that Clicquot is a French word, and ought not, under any circumstances whatever, to be pronounced "Clickot."

Then we went down to Derwentwater. It was a warm and clear twilight. Between the dark green lines of the hedges we met maidens in white with scarlet opera-cloaks, coming home through the narrow lane. Then we got into the open, and found the shores of the silver lake, and got into a boat and sailed out upon the still waters, so that we could face the wonders of a brilliant sunset.

But all that glow of red and yellow in the north-west was as nothing to the strange gradations of colour that appeared along the splendid range of mountain-peaks beyond the lake. From the remote north round to the south-east they stretched like a mighty wall; and whereas near the gold and crimson of the sunset they were of a warm, roseate, and half-transparent purple, as they came along into the darker regions of the twilight they grew more and more cold in hue and harsh in outline. Up there in the north they had caught the magic colours so that they themselves seemed but light clouds of beautiful vapour; but as the eye followed the line of twisted and mighty shapes, the rose-colour deepened into purple, the purple grew darker and more dark, and greens and blues began to appear over the wooded islands and shores of Derwent-water. Finally, away down there in the south there was a lowering sky, into which rose wild masses of slate-coloured mountains, and in the threatening and yet clear darkness that reigned among these soli-

tudes we could see but one small tuft of white cloud that clung coldly to the gloomy summit of Glaramara.

That strange darkness in the south boded rain; and, as if in anticipation of the wet, the fires of the sunset went down, and a grey twilight fell over the land. As we walked home between the tall hedges there was a chill dampness in the air; and we seemed to know that we had at last bade good-bye to the beautiful weather that had lit up for us the blue water and green shores of Grasmere.

[*Note by Queen Titania.*—"I begin to think the old lady in Nottinghamshire had some excuse for what she said, although she need not have expressed herself so *rudely*. Of course it is impossible to put down all that we spoke about on those happy days of our journey; but when all the ordinary talk is *carefully excluded*, and everything *spiteful* retained, I cannot wonder that a stranger should think that my husband and myself do not lead a *very pleasant life*. It looks very *serious* when it is put in type; whereas we have been driven into all this nonsense of quarrelling merely to temper the excessive sentimentality of those young folks, which is quite *amusing* in its way. Indeed, I am afraid that Bell, although she has never said a word to that effect to me, is *far more deeply pledged* than one who thinks he has a great insight into such affairs has any notion of. I am sure it was none of my doing. If Bell had told me she was engaged to Arthur, nothing could have given me greater pleasure. In the meantime, I hope no one will read too literally the foregoing pages, and think that in our house we are continually treading on lucifer matches and frightening everybody by small explosions. I suppose it is *literary art* that compels such a perversion of the truth! And as for Chapter Twenty-six—which has a great deal of nonsense in it about Richmond—I should think that a very good motto for it would be two lines I once saw quoted somewhere. I don't know who is the author; but they said—

"'*The legend is as true, I undertake,*
*As Tristram is, or Lancelot of the Lake.*'"]

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### ALONG THE GRETA.

"You stood before me like a thought,
A dream remembered in a dream.
But when those meek eyes first did seem
To tell me, Love within you wrought—
O Greta, dear domestic stream!
Has not, since then, Love's prompture deep,
Has not Love's whisper evermore,
Been ceaseless as thy gentle roar?
Sole voice, when other voices sleep,
Dear under-song in Clamor's hour."

"Now, Bell," says Tita, "I am going to ask you a serious question."

"Yes, Mamma," says the girl, dutifully.

"Where is the North Country?"

Good gracious! This was a pretty topic to start as we sat idly by the shores of Derwentwater, and watched the great white clouds move lazily over the mountain peaks beyond. For, did it not involve some haphazard remark of Bell's, which would instantly plunge the Lieutenant into the history of Strathclyde, so as to prove, in defiance of the first principles of logic and the Ten Commandments, that the girl was altogether right? Bell solved the difficulty in a novel fashion. She merely repeated, in a low and careless voice, some lines from the chief favourite of all her songs—

"While sadly I roam, I regret my dear home,
Where lads and young lasses are making the hay,
The merry bells ring, and the birds sweetly sing,
And maidens and meadows are pleasant and gay:
Oh! the oak and the ash, and the bonny ivy-tree,
They grow so green in the North Countree!"

"But where is it?" says Tita. "You are always looking to the North and never getting there. Down in Oxford, you were all anxiety to get up to Wales. Once in Wales, you hurried us on to Westmoreland. Now you are in Westmoreland, you are still

hankering after the North, and I want to know where you mean to stop. At Carlisle? Or Edinburgh? Or John o' Groat's?"

The little woman was becoming quite eloquent in her quiet and playful fashion, as she sat there with Bell's hand in hers. The girl looked rather embarrassed and so, of course, the Lieutenant, always on the look-out for such a chance, must needs whip up his heavy artillery and open fire on Bell's opponent.

"No, Madame," he says; "why should you fix down that beautiful country to any place? Is it not better to have the dream always before you? You are too practical——"

Too practical!—This from an impertinent young Uhlan to a gentle lady whose eyes are full of wistful visions and fancies from the morning to the night!

"——It is better that you have it like the El Dorado that the old travellers went to seek—always in front of them, but never just in sight. Mademoiselle is quite right not to put down her beautiful country in the map."

"Count von Rosen," says my Lady, with some show of petulance, "you are always proving Bell to be in the right. You never help me; and you know I never get any assistance from the quarter whence it ought to come. Now, if I were to say that I belonged to the North Country, you would never think of bringing all sorts of historical arguments to prove that I did."

"Madame," says the young man, with great modesty, "the reason is that you never need any such arguments, for you are always in the right at the first."

Here Bell laughs in a very malicious manner; for was not the retort provoked? My Lady asks the girl to watch the creeping of a shadow over the summit of Glaramara, as if that had anything to do with the history of Deira.

Well, the women owed us some explanation; for between them they had resolved upon our setting out for Penrith that afternoon. All the excursions we had planned in this beautiful neighbourhood had to be

abandoned, and for no ostensible reason whatever. That there must be some occult reason, however, for this odd resolve was quite certain; and the Lieutenant and myself were left to fit such keys to the mystery as we might think proper.

Was it really, then, this odd longing of Bell's to go northward, or was it not rather a secret consciousness that Arthur would cease to accompany us at Carlisle? The young man had remained behind at the hotel that morning. He had important letters to write, he said. A telegram had arrived for him while we were at breakfast; and he had remarked, in a careless way, that it was from Mr. Tatham, Katty's father. Perhaps it was. There is no saying what a reckless young fellow may not goad an elderly gentleman into doing; but if this message, as we were given to understand, had really something to do with Arthur's relations towards Katty, it was certainly an odd matter to arrange by telegraph.

As for the Lieutenant, he appeared to treat the whole affair with a cool indifference which was probably assumed. In private conversation he informed me that what Arthur might do in the way of marrying Miss Tatham, or anybody else, was of no consequence whatever to him.

"Mademoiselle will tell me my fate—that is enough," he said. "You think that I am careless,—yes? It is not so, except I am convinced your friend from Twickenham has nothing to do with it. No, he will not marry Mademoiselle—that is so clear that anyone may see it—but he may induce her, frighten her, complain of her, so that she will not marry me. Good. If it is so, I will know who has served me that way."

"You needn't look as if you meant to eat up the whole family," I say to him.

"And more," he continued, with even greater fierceness, "it has come to be too much, this. He shall not go beyond Carlisle with us. I will not allow Mademoiselle to be persecuted. You will say I have no right—that it is no business of mine——"

"That is precisely what I do say. Leave the girl to manage her own affairs. If she wishes Arthur to go, she can do it with a word. Do you think there is no method of giving a young man his *congé* than by breaking his neck?"

"Oh, you think, then, that Mademoiselle wishes him to remain near her?"

A sudden and cold reserve had fallen over the young fellow's manner. He stood there for a moment as if he calmly expected to hear the worst, and was ready to pack up his traps and betake himself to the south.

"I tell you again," I say, "that I think nothing about it, and know nothing about it. But as for the decree of Providence which ordained that young people in love should become the pest and torture of their friends, of all the inscrutable, unjust, perplexing, and monstrous facts of life, this is about the worst. I will take a cigar from you, if you please."

"That is all you care for—yes—a cigar," says the young man, peevishly. 'If the phaeton were to be smashed to pieces this afternoon—a cigar. If Mademoiselle were to go and marry this wretched fellow—again, a cigar. I do not think that you care more for anything around you than the seal which comes up and shakes hands with his keeper in the Zoological Gardens."

"Got a light?"

"And yet I think it is possible you will get a surprise very soon. Yes! and will not be so indifferent. After Carlisle——"

"After Carlisle you come to Gretna Green. But if you propose to run away with Bell, don't take my horses—they are not used to hard work."

"Run away! You do talk as if Mademoiselle were willing to run away with anybody. No, it is quite another thing."

And here the Lieutenant, getting into the morose state—which always follows the fierceness of a lover—begins to pull about the shawls and pack them up.

Nevertheless, the eighteen miles between Keswick

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and Penrith proved one of the pleasantest portions of our journey. There was not much driving, it is true. We started at mid-day, and, having something like five or six hours in which to get over this stretch of mountain and moorland road, we spent most of the time in walking, even Tita descending from her usual post to wander along the hedgerows and look down into the valley of the Greta. As the white road rose gradually from the plains of the lakes, taking us along the slopes of the mighty Saddleback, the view of the beautiful country behind us grew more extended and lovely. The clear silver day showed us the vast array of mountains in the palest of hues; and as white clouds floated over the hills and the gleaming surface of Derwentwater, even the shadows seemed pale and luminous. There was no mist, but a bewildering glare of light, that seemed at once to transpose and blend the clouds, the sky, the hills, and the lake. There was plenty of motion in the picture, too, for there was a south wind blowing light shadows of grey across the silver whiteness; but there was no louring mass of vapour lying up at the horizon, and all our evil anticipations of the previous day remained unfulfilled.

What a picturesque glen is that over which the great mass of Saddleback towers! We could hear the Greta rushing down the chasm through a world of light-green foliage; and sometimes we got a glimpse of the stream itself—a rich brown, with dashes of white foam. Then you cross the river where it is joined by St. John's Beck; and as you slowly climb the sides of Saddleback, the Greta becomes the Glenderamackin, and by and by you lose it altogether as it strikes off to the north. But there are plenty of streams about. Each gorge and valley has its beck; and you can hear the splashing of the water where there is nothing visible but masses of young trees lying warm and green in the sunshine.

And as for the wild-flowers that grow here in a

wonderful luxuriance of form and colour, who can describe them? The Lieutenant was growing quite learned in English wild blossoms. He could tell the difference between Herb Robert and Ragged Robin, was not to be deceived into believing the rock-rose a buttercup, and had become profound in the study of the various speedwells. But he was a late scholar. Arthur had been under Bell's tuition years before. He knew all the flowers she liked best; he could pick them out at a distance without going through the trouble of laboriously comparing them, as our poor Lieutenant had to do. You should have seen these two young men—with black rage in their hearts—engaged in the idyllic pastime of culling pretty blossoms for a fair maiden. Bell treated them both with a simple indifference that was begotten chiefly by the very definite interest she had in their pursuit. She was really thinking a good deal more of her tangled and picturesque bouquet than of the intentions of the young men in bringing the flowers to her. She was speedily to be recalled from her dream.

At a certain portion of the way we came upon a lot of forget-me-nots, that were growing amid the roadside grass, meaning no harm. The pale turquoise blue of the flowers was looking up to the silver-white fleece of the sky, just as if there was some communion between the two that rude human hands had no right to break. Arthur made a plunge at them. He pulled up at once some half-dozen stalks and came back with them to Bell.

"Here," he said, with a strange sort of smile, "are some forget-me-nots for you. They are supposed to be typical of woman's constancy, are they not?—for they keep fresh about half-a-dozen hours."

Bell received the flowers without a trace of surprise or vexation in her manner; and then, with the most admirable self-possession, she turned to the Lieutenant, separated one of the flowers from the lot, and said, with a great gentleness and calmness—

"Count von Rosen, do you care to have one of these? You have very pretty songs about the forget-me-not, in Germany."

I believe that young fellow did not know whether he was dead or alive at the moment when the girl addressed him thus. For a single second a flash of surprise and bewilderment appeared in his face, and then he took the flower from her and said, looking down as if he did not wish any of us to see his face—

"Mademoiselle, thank you."

But almost directly afterwards he had recovered himself. With an air as if nothing had happened, he pulled out his pocket-book, most carefully and tenderly put the flower in it, and closed it again. Arthur, with his face as hot as fire, had begun to talk to Tita about Threlkeld Hall.

It was a pretty little scene to be enacted on this bright morning, on a grassy wayside in Cumberland, with all the lakes and mountains of Westmoreland for a blue and silvery background. But after all, of what importance was it? A girl may hand her companion of the moment a flower without any deadly intent? How was anyone to tell, indeed, that she had so turned to the Lieutenant as a retort to Arthur's not very courteous remark? There was no appearance of vexation in her manner. On the contrary, she turned and gave Von Rosen this paltry little forget-me-not, and made a remark about German songs, just as she might have done at home in Surrey to any of the young fellows who come dawdling about the house, wondering why such a pretty girl should not betray a preference for somebody. Even as a punishment for Arthur's piece of impudence, it might not have any but the most transitory significance. Bell is quick to feel any remark of the kind; and it is just possible that at the moment she may have been stung into executing this pretty and pastoral deed of vengeance.

But the Lieutenant, at all events, was persuaded that something of mighty import had just occurred on the picturesque banks of this Cumberland stream. He hung

about Bell for some time, but seemed afraid to address her, and had ceased to offer her flowers. He was permitted to bring her a sunshade, however, and that pleased him greatly. And thereafter he went up to the horses, and walked by their heads, and addressed them in very kindly and soothing language, just as if they had done him some great service.

Arthur came back to us.

"It looks rather ridiculous," he said, abruptly, "to see the procession of this horse and dog-cart following your phaeton. Hadn't I better drive on to Penrith?"

"The look of it does not matter here, surely," says Bell. "We have only met two persons since we started, and we shan't find many people up in this moorland we are coming to."

"Oh, as you please," said the young man, a trifle mollified. "If you don't mind, of course I don't."

Presently he said, with something of an effort—

"How long is your journey to last altogether?"

"I don't know," I say to him. "We shall be in Edinburgh in two or three days, and our project of driving thither accomplished. But we may spend a week or two in Scotland after that."

"Count von Rosen is very anxious to see something of Scotland," says Bell, with the air of a person conveying information.

I knew why Count von Rosen was so anxious to see something of Scotland—he would have welcomed a journey to the North Pole if only he was sure that Bell was going there too. But Arthur said, somewhat sharply—

"I am glad I shall escape the duty of dancing attendance on a stranger. I suppose you mean to take him to the Tower and to Madame Tussaud's when you return to London?"

"But won't you come on with us to Edinburgh, Arthur?" says Bell, quite amiably.

"No, thank you," he says; and then, turning to me, "How much does it cost to send a horse and trap from Carlisle to London?"

"From Edinburgh it costs 10*l.* 5*s.*, so you may calculate."

"I suppose I can get a late train to-morrow night for myself?"

"There is one after midnight."

He spoke in a gloomy way, that had nevertheless some affectation of carelessness in it. Bell again expressed her regret that he could not accompany us to Edinburgh; but he did not answer.

We were now about to get into our respective vehicles, for before us lay a long stretch of high moorland road, and we had been merely idling the time away during the last mile or two.

"Won't you get into the dog-cart for a bit, Bell?" says Arthur.

"Oh yes, if you like," says Bell, good-naturedly.

The Lieutenant, knowing nothing of this proposal, was rather astonished when, after having called to him to stop the horses, we came up and Bell was assisted into the dog-cart, Arthur following and taking the reins. The rest of us got into the phaeton; but, of course, Arthur had got the start of us, and went on in front.

"How far on is Gretna Green?" asks my Lady in a low voice.

The Lieutenant scowled, and regarded the two figures in front of us in anything but an amiable mood.

"You do not care much for her safety to entrust her to that stupid boy," he remarks.

"Do you think he will really run away with her?" says Tita.

"Run away!" repeats the Lieutenant, with some scorn; "if he were to try that, or any other foolish thing, do you know what you would see? You would see Mademoiselle take the reins from him, and go where she pleased in spite of him. Do you think that she is controlled by that pitiful fellow?"

Whatever control Bell possessed, there was no doubt at all that Arthur was taking her away from us at a considerable pace. After that stretch of moorland

the road got very hilly; and no man who is driving his own horses likes to run them up steep ascents for the mere pleasure of catching a runaway boy and his sweetheart. In the ups and downs of this route we sometimes lost sight of Bell and Arthur altogether. The Lieutenant was so wroth that he dared not speak. Tita grew a trifle anxious, and at last she said—

"Won't you drive on and overtake these young people? I am sure Arthur is forgetting how hilly the road is."

"I don't. Arthur is driving somebody else's horse, but I can't afford to ill-treat my own in order to stop him."

"I am sure your horses have not been overworked," says the Lieutenant; and at this moment, as we get to the crest of a hill, we find that the two fugitives are on the top of the next incline.

"*Hillo! Hie! Heh!*"

Two faces turn round. A series of pantomimic gestures now conveys my Lady's wishes, and we see Arthur jump down to the ground, assist Bell to alight, and then she begins to pull some grass for the horse.

When we, also, get to the top of this hill, lo! the wonderful sight that spreads out before us! Along the northern horizon stands a pale line of mountains, and as we look down into the great plain that lies between, the yellow light of the sunset touches a strange sort of mist, so that you would think there lay a broad estuary or a great arm of the sea. We ourselves are in shadow, but all the wide landscape before us is bathed in golden fire and smoke; and up there, ranged along the sky, are the pale hills that stand like phantoms rising out of another world.

Bell comes into the phaeton. We set out again along the hilly road, getting comforted presently by the landlord of a wayside inn, who says, "Ay, the road goes pretty mooch doon bank a' t' waay to Penrith, after ye get a mile forrit." Bell cannot tell us whether this is pure Cumbrian, or Cumbrian mixed

with Scotch, but the Lieutenant insists that it does not much matter, for "forrit" is very good Frisian. The chances are that we should have suffered another sermon on the German origin of our language, but that signs of a town became visible. We drove in from the country highways in the gathering twilight. There were lights in the streets of Penrith, but the place itself seemed to have shut up and gone to bed. It was but half-past eight; yet nearly every shop was shut, and the inn into which we drove had clearly got over its day's labour. If we had asked for dinner at this hour, the simple folks would probably have laughed at us; so we called it supper, and a very excellent supper it was.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### "ADE!"

"Edwin, if right I read my song,
With slighted passion paced along,
All in the moony light;
'Twas near an old enchanted court,
Where sportive fairies made resort
To revel out the night."

"I AM so sorry you can't come further with us than Carlisle," says Queen Titania to Arthur, with a great kindliness for the lad shining in her brown eyes.

"Duty calls me back—and pleasure, too," he says, with rather a melancholy smile. "You will receive a message from me, I expect, shortly after I return. Where will letters find you in Scotland?"

This was rather a difficult question to answer; but it took us away from the dangerous subject of Arthur's intentions, about which the less said at that moment the better. The Lieutenant professed a great desire to spend two or three weeks in Scotland; and Bell began to sketch out phantom tours, whisking about from Loch Lubnaig to Loch Long, cutting round the Mull of

Cantire, and coming back from Oban to the Crinan in a surprising manner.

"And, Mademoiselle," says he, "perhaps to-morrow, when you get into Scotland, you will begin to tell me something of the Scotch songs, if it does not trouble you. I have read some—yes—of Burns's songs, mostly through Freiligrath's translations, but I have not heard any sung, and I know that you know them all. Oh yes, I liked them very much—they are good, hearty songs, not at all melancholy; and an excellent fellow of that country I met in the war—he was a correspondent for some newspaper, and he was at Metz, but he was as much of a soldier as any man of us—he told me there is not any such music as the music of the Scotch songs. That is a very bold thing to say, you know, Mademoiselle; but if you will sing some of them, I will give you my frank opinion."

"Very well," says Mademoiselle, with a gracious smile, "but I think I ought to begin to-day, for there is a great deal of ground to be got over."

"So much the better," says he.

"But if you young people," says Queen Tita, "who are all bent on your own pleasure, would let me make a suggestion, I think I can put your musical abilities to a better use. I am going to give a concert as soon as I get home, for the benefit of our Clothing Club; and I want you to undertake, Count von Rosen, to sing for us two or three German songs—Körner's war-songs, for example."

"Oh, with great pleasure, Madame, if you will not all laugh at my singing."

Unhappy wretch—another victim! But it was a mercy she asked him only for a few songs, instead of hinting something about a contribution. That was probably to come.

"Bell," says my Lady, "do you think we ought to charge twopence this time?"

On this tremendous financial question Bell declined to express an opinion, beyond suggesting that the people, if they could only be induced to come,

would value the concert all the more. A much more practical proposal, however, is placed before this committee now assembled in Penrith. At each of these charity-concerts in our schoolroom, a chamber is set apart for the display of various viands and an uncommon quantity of champagne, devoted to the use of the performers, their friends, and a few special guests. It is suggested that the expense of this entertainment should not always fall upon one person; there being several householders in the neighbourhood who were much more able to afford such promiscuous banquets.

"I am sure," says my Lady, with some emphasis, "that I know several gentlemen who would only be too eager to come forward and send those refreshments, if they only knew you were making such a fuss about it."

"My dear," I say, humbly, "I wish you would speak to them on this subject."

"I wouldn't demean myself so far," says Tita, "as to ask for wine and biscuits from my neighbours."

"I wish these neighbours wouldn't drink so much of my champagne."

"But it is a charity; why should you grumble?" says the Lieutenant.

"Why? These abandoned ruffians and their wives give five shillings to the charity, and come and eat and drink ten shillings' worth of my food and wine. That is why."

"Never mind," says Bell, with her gentle voice; "when Count von Rosen comes to sing we shall have a great audience, and there will be a lot of money taken at the door, and we shall be able to clear all expenses and pay you, too, for the champagne."

"At sevenpence-halfpenny a bottle, I suppose?"

"I did not think you got it so cheap," says Tita, with a pleasing look of innocence; and therewith the young folks began to laugh, as they generally do when she says anything specially impertinent.

Just before starting for Carlisle, we happened to be in the old churchyard of Penrith, looking at the pillars which are supposed to mark the grave of a giant of old, and trying to persuade ourselves that we saw something like Runic carvings on the stones. There came forward to us a strange-looking person, who said suddenly—

"God bless you!"

There was no harm in that, at all events, but presently he began to attach himself to Arthur, and insisted on talking to him; while, whenever the young man seemed inclined to resent this intrusion, the mysterious stranger put in another "God bless you!" so as to disarm criticism. We speedily discovered that this person was a sort of whiskified Old Mortality, who claimed to have cut all manner of tombstones standing around; and to Arthur, whom he specially affected, he continually appealed with "Will that do, eh? I did that—will that do, eh?" The young man was not in a communicative mood, to begin with; but the persecution he now suffered was like to have driven him wild. In vain he moved away: the other followed him. In vain he pretended not to listen: the other did not care. He would probably have expressed his feelings warmly, but for the pious ejaculation which continually came in; and when a man says "God bless you," you can't with decency wish him the reverse. At length, out of pure compassion, the Lieutenant went over to the man, and said—

"Well, you are a very wicked old gentleman, to have been drinking at this time in the morning."

"God bless you!"

"Thank you. You have given to us your blessing all round: now will you kindly go away?"

"Wouldn't you like to see a bit of my cutting, now, eh?"

"No, I wouldn't; I would like to see you go home and get a sleep, and get up sober."

"God bless you!"

"The same to you. Good-bye"—and behold!

Arthur was delivered, and returned, blushing like a girl, to the women, who had been rather afraid of this half-tipsy or half-silly person, and remained at a distance.

You may be sure that when we were about to start from Penrith, the Lieutenant did not forget to leave out Bell's guitar-case. And so soon as we were well away from the town, and bowling along the level road that leads up to Carlisle, the girl put the blue ribbon round her shoulder and began to cast about for a song. Arthur was driving close behind us—occasionally sending on the cob so as to exchange a remark or two with my Lady. The wheels made no great noise, however; and in the silence lying over the shining landscape around us, we heard the clear, full, sweet tones of Bell's voice as well as if she had been singing in a room,

"Behind yon hills where Lugar flows—"

That was the first song that she sung; and it was well the Lieutenant was not a Scotchman, and had never heard the air as it is daily played on the Clyde steamers by wandering fiddlers.

"I don't mean to sing all the songs," says Bell, presently; "I shall only give you a verse or so of each of those I know, so that you may judge of them. Now this is a fighting song;" and with that she sung with fine courage—

"Here's Kenmure's health in wine, Willie!
Here's Kenmure's health in wine!
There ne'er was a coward o' Kenmure's blood,
Nor yet o' Gordon's line!
Oh, Kenmure's lads are men, Willie!
Oh, Kenmure's lads are men!
Their hearts and swords are metal true,
And that their foes shall ken!"

How was it that she always sang these wild, rebellious, Jacobite songs with so great an accession of spirit? Never in our southern home had she seemed to care anything about them. There, the only Scotch songs she used to sing for us were the plaintive

laments of unhappy lovers, and such-like things; whereas now she was all for blood and slaughter, for the gathering of the clans, and the general destruction of law and order. I don't believe she knew who Kenmure was. As for the Braes o' Mar, and Callander and Airlie, she had never seen one of these places. And what was this "kane" of which she sang so proudly?—

"Hark the horn!
Up i' the morn;
Bonnie lad, come to the march to-morrow!
Down the Glen,
Grant and his men,
They shall pay kane to the King the morn!
Down by Knockhaspie,
Down by Gillespie,
Many a red runt nods the horn;
Waken not Callum,
Rouky, nor Allan—
They shall pay kane to the King the morn!"

"Why, what a warlike creature you have become, Bell!" says Queen Titania. "Ever since you sang those songs of Maria, with Count von Rosen as the old sergeant, you seem to have forgotten all the pleasant old ballads of melancholy and regret, and taken to nothing but fire and sword. Now, if you were to sing about Logan Braes, or Lucy's Flitting, or Annie's Tryst——"

"I am coming to them," says Bell, meekly.

"No, Mademoiselle," interposes the Lieutenant, "please do not sing any more just now. You will sing again, in the afternoon, yes? But at present you will harm your voice to sing too much."

Now she had only sung snatches of three songs. What business had he to interfere, and become her guardian? Yet you should have seen how quietly and naturally she laid aside the guitar as soon as he had spoken, and how she handed it to him to put in the case: my Lady looked hard at her gloves, which she always does when she is inwardly laughing and determined that no smile shall appear on her face.

It was rather hard upon Arthur that he should be banished into that solitary trap; but he rejoined us when we stopped at High Hesket to bait the horses, and have a snack of something for lunch. What a picture of desolation is the White Ox of this village! Once upon a time this broad road formed part of the great highway leading towards the north; and here the coaches stopped for the last time before driving into Carlisle. It is a large hostelry; but it had such an appearance of loneliness and desertion about it, that we stopped at the front door (which was shut) to ask whether they could put the horses up. An old lady, dressed in black, and with a worn and sad face, appeared. We could put the horses up, yes. As for luncheon, we could have ham and eggs. The butcher only came to the place twice a week; and as no traveller stopped here now, no butcher's meat was kept on the premises. We went into the great stables; and found an ostler who looked at us with a wonderful astonishment shining in his light-blue eyes. Looking at the empty stalls, he said he could remember when forty horses were put up there every day. It was the railway that had done it.

We had our ham and eggs in a large and melancholy parlour, filled with old-fashioned pictures and ornaments. The elderly servant-woman who waited on us told us that a gentleman had stopped at the inn on the Monday night before; but it turned out that he was walking to Carlisle, and that he had got afraid of two navvies on the road, and that he therefore had taken a bed there. Before him, no one had stopped at the inn since Whitsuntide. It was all because of them railways.

We hastened away from this doleful and deserted inn, so soon as the horses were rested. They had easy work of it for the remainder of the day's journey. The old coach-road is here remarkably broad, level, and well-made, and we bowled along the solitary highway as many a vehicle had done in bygone years.

As we drove into "merry Carlisle," the lamps were lit in the twilight, and numbers of people in the streets. For the convenience of Arthur, we put up at an hotel abutting on the railway station, and then went off to stable the horses elsewhere.

It was rather a melancholy dinner we had in a corner of the great room. The gloom that overspread Arthur's face was too obvious. In vain the Lieutenant talked profoundly to us of the apple legend of Tell in its various appearances (he had just been cribbing his knowledge from Professor Buchheim's excellent essay), and said he would go with my Lady next morning to see the market-place where William of Cloudeslee, who afterwards shot the apple from off his son's head, was rescued from justice by two of his fellow outlaws. Tita was far more concerned to see Arthur of somewhat better spirits on this the last night of his being with us. On our sitting down to dinner, she had said to him, with a pretty smile—

> "King Arthur lives in merry Carlisle,
> And seemly is to see;
> And there with him Queen Guenever,
> That bride so bright of blee."

But was it not an unfortunate quotation, however kindly meant? Queen Guenever sat there—as frank, and gracious, and beautiful as a queen or a bride might be—but not with him. That affair of the little blue flower on the banks of the Greta was still rankling in his mind.

He bore himself bravely, however. He would not have the women remain up to see him away by the 12.45 train. He bade good-bye to both of them without wincing, and looked after Bell for a moment as she left; and then he went away into a large and gloomy smoking-room, and sat down there in silence. The Lieutenant and I went with him. He was not inclined to speak; and at length Von Rosen, apparently to break the horrible spell of the place, said—

"Will they give the horse any corn or water on the journey?"

"I don't think so," said the lad, absently, "but I have telegraphed for a man to be at the station and take the cob into the nearest stables."

And with that he forced himself to talk of some of his adventures by the way, while as yet he was driving by himself; though we could see he was thinking of something very different. At last the train from the North came in. He shook hands with us with a fine indifference; and we saw him bundle himself up in a corner of the carriage, with a cigar in his mouth. There was nothing tragic in his going away; and yet there was not in all England a more wretched creature than the young man who thus started on his lonely night-journey; and I afterwards heard that, up in the railway-hotel at this moment, one tender heart was still beating a little more quickly at the thought of his going, and two wakeful eyes were full of unconscious tears.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### OVER THE BORDER.

"And here awhile the Muse,
High hovering o'er the broad cerulean scene,
Sees Caledonia in romantic view:
Her airy mountains, from the waving main,
Invested with a keen, diffusive sky,
Breathing the soul acute; her forests huge
Incult, robust, and tall, by Nature's hand
Planted of old; her azure lakes between
Poured out expansive, and of watery wealth
Full; winding, deep, and green, her fertile vales
With many a cool translucent brimming flood
Washed lovely from the Tweed (pure *parent stream*
Whose pastoral banks first heard my Doric reed,
With sylvan Gled, thy tributary brook)."

THAT next morning in Carlisle—as we walked about the red old city that is set amid beautiful green meadows interlaced with streams—there was something about

Queen Titania's manner that I could not understand. She arrogated to herself a certain importance. She treated ordinary topics of talk with disdain. She had evidently become possessed of a great secret. Now, everyone knows that the best way to discover a secret is to let the owner of it alone; if it is of great importance, she is sure to tell it you, and if it is of no importance, your ignorance of it won't hurt you.

We were up in that fine old castle, leaning on the parapets of red sandstone and gazing away up to the north, where a line of Scotch hills lay on the horizon. That is a pretty landscape that lies around Carlisle Castle—the bright and grassy meadows through which the Eden winds, the woods and heights of the country beyond, the far stretches of sand at the mouth of the Solway, and the blue line of hills telling of the wilder regions of Scotland.

In the courtyard below us we can see the Lieutenant instructing Bell in the art of fortification. My Lady looks at them for a moment, and says—

"Bell is near her North Country at last."

There is at all events nothing very startling in that disclosure. She pauses for a moment or two, and is apparently regarding with wistful eyes the brilliant landscape around, across which dashes of shadow are slowly moving from the west. Then she adds—

"I suppose you are rather puzzled to account for Arthur's coming up to see us this last time."

"I never try to account for the insane actions of young people in love."

"That is your own experience, I suppose?" she says, daintily.

"Precisely so—of you. But what is this about Arthur?"

"Don't you really think it looks absurd—his having come to join us a second time for no apparent purpose whatever?"

"Proceed."

"Oh," she says, with some little *hauteur*, "I am not anxious to tell you anything."

"But I am dying to hear. Have you not marked my impatience ever since we set out this morning?"

"No, I haven't. But I will tell you all the same, if you promise to say not a word of it to the Count."

"I? Say anything to the Lieutenant? The man who would betray the confidences of his wife—except when it suited his own purpose— But what have you got to say about Arthur?"

"Only this—that his coming to see us was not so aimless as it might appear. Yesterday he asked Bell definitely if she would marry him."

She smiles—with an air of pride. She knows she has produced a sensation.

"Would you like to know where? In an old inn at High Hesket—where they seem to have been left alone for a minute or two. And Bell told him frankly that she could not marry him."

Think of it! In that deserted old inn, with its forsaken chambers and empty stalls, and occasional visits from a wandering butcher, a tragedy had been enacted so quietly that none of us had known. If folks were always to transact the most important business of their lives in this quiet, undramatic, unobserved way, whence would come all the material for our pictures, and plays, and books? These young people, so far as we knew, had never struck an attitude, nor uttered an exclamation; for, now that one had time to remember, on our entering into the parlour where Bell and Arthur had been left, she was quietly looking out of the window, and he came forward to ask how many miles it was to Carlisle. They got into the vehicles outside as if nothing had happened. They chatted as usual on the road into Carlisle. Nay, at dinner, how did those young hypocrites manage to make believe that they were on their old footing, so as to deceive us all?

"My dear," I say to her, "we have been robbed of a scene."

"I am glad there was no scene. There is more likely to be a scene when Arthur goes back and tells

Dr. Ashburton that he means to marry Katty Tatham. He is sure to do that; and you know the Doctor was very much in favour of Arthur's marrying Bell."

"Well, now, I suppose, all that is wanted for the completion of your diabolical project is that Bell should marry that young Prussian down there—who will be arrested in a minute or two if he does not drop his inquiries."

Tita looked up with a stare of well-affected surprise.

"That is quite another matter, I assure you. You may be quite certain that Bell did not refuse Count von Rosen before without some very good reason; and the mere fact of Arthur's going away does not pledge her a bit. No—quite the contrary. He would be very foolish if he asked her at this moment to become his wife. She is very sorry about Arthur, and so am I; but I confess that when I learned his case was hopeless, and that I could do nothing to help him, I was greatly relieved. But don't breathe a word of what I have told you to Count Von Rosen. Bell would never forgive me if it were to reach his ears. But oh!" says Queen Tita, almost clasping her hands, while a bright light beams over her face, 'I *should* like to see those two married. I am sure they are so fond of each other. Can you doubt it, if you look at them for a moment or two——"

But they had disappeared from the courtyard below. Almost at the same moment that she uttered these words, she instinctively turned, and lo! there were Bell and her companion advancing to join us. The poor little woman blushed dreadfully in spite of all her assumption of gracious self-possession; but it was apparent that the young folks had not overheard, and no harm was done.

At length we started for Gretna. There might have been some obvious jokes going upon this subject, had not some recollection of Arthur interfered. Was it because of his departure, also, that the Lieutenant forbore to press Bell for the Scotch songs that she had

promised him? Or was it not rather that the brightness and freshness of this rare forenoon were in themselves sufficient exhilaration? We drove down by the green meadows, and over the Eden bridge. We clambered up the hill opposite, and drove past the suburban villas there. We had got so much accustomed to sweet perfumes floating to us from the hedgerows and the fields, that we at first did not perceive that certain specially pleasant odours were the product of some large nurseries close by. Then we got out to that "shedding" of the roads, which marks the junction of the highways coming down from Glasgow and Edinburgh; and here we chose the former, which would take us through Gretna and Moffat, leaving us to strike eastward towards Edinburgh afterwards.

The old mail-coach road to the North is quite deserted now, but it is a pleasant road for all that, well-made and smooth, with tracts of grass along each side, and tall and profuse hedges that only partially hide from view the dusky northern landscape with its blue line of hills beyond. Mile after mile, however, we did not meet a single creature on this deserted highway; and when at length we reached a solitary turnpike, the woman in charge thereof regarded us with a look of surprise, as if we were a party of runaways who had blundered into the notion that Gretna-green marriages were still possible.

The Lieutenant, who was driving, got talking with the woman about these marriages, and the incidents that must have occurred at this very turnpike, and of the stories in the neighbourhood about that picturesque and gay old time. She—with her eyes still looking towards our Bell, as if she suspected that the young man had quite an exceptional interest in talking of marriages—told us some of her own reminiscences with a great deal of good humour; but it is sad to think that these anecdotes were chiefly of quarrels and separations —some of them occurring before the happy pair had crossed the first bridge on their homeward route. Whether these stories were not edifying, or whether a

great bank of clouds, coming up from the north against the wind, looked very ominous, Bell besought her companion to drive on; and so on he went.

It was a lonely place in which to be caught by a thunderstorm. We came to the river Esk, and found its shallow waters flowing down a broad and shingly channel, leaving long islands of sand between. There was not a house in sight—only the marshy meadows, the river-beds, and the low flats of sand stretching out to the Solway Frith. Scotland was evidently bent on giving us a wet welcome. From the hills in the north those black masses of vapour came crowding up, and a strange silence fell over the land. Then a faint glimmer of red appeared somewhere; and a low noise was heard. Presently a long narrow streak of forked lightning went darting across the black background, there was a smart roll of thunder, and then all around us the first clustering of heavy rain was heard among the leaves. We had the hood put up hastily. Bell and Tita were speedily swathed in shawls and waterproofs: and the Lieutenant sent the horses on at a good pace, hoping to reach Gretna Green before we should be washed into the Solway. Then began the wild play of the elements. On all sides of us the bewildering glare of steel-blue seemed to flash about, and the horses, terrified by the terrific peals of thunder, went plunging on through the torrents of rain.

"Mademoiselle," cried the Lieutenant, with the water streaming over his face and down his great beard, "your Westmoreland rain,—it was nothing to this."

Bell sat mute and patient, with her face down to escape the blinding torrents. Perhaps had we crossed the Border in beautiful weather, she would have got down from the phaeton, and pulled some pretty flower to take away with her as a memento; but now we could see nothing, hear nothing, think of nothing, but the crashes of the thunder, the persistent waterfall, and those sudden glares that from time to time robbed us of our eyesight for several seconds. Some little time before reaching the river Sark, which is here the boun-

dary-line between the two countries, we passed a small wayside inn; but we did not think of stopping there, when Gretna promised to afford us more certain shelter. We drove on and over the Sark. We pulled up for a moment at the famous toll-house.

"We are over the Border!" cried Bell, as we drove on again; but what of Scotland could she see in this wild storm of rain?

Surely no runaway lover was ever more glad to see that small church perched up on a hillock among trees than we were when we came in sight of Gretna. But where was the inn? There were a few cottages by the wayside, and there was one woman who kindly came out to look at us.

No sooner had the Lieutenant heard that there was no inn in the place, than, without a word—but with an awful look of determination on his face—he turned the horses clean round and set them off at a gallop down the road to the Sark.

"Perhaps they can't take us in at that small place," said my Lady.

"They must take us in," said he, between his teeth; and with that we found ourselves in England again.

He drove us up to the front of the square building. With his whip-hand he dashed away the rain from his eyes and moustache, and called aloud. Lo! what strange vision was that which appeared to us, in this lonely place, in the middle of a storm? Through the mist of the rain we beheld the doorway of the inn suddenly becoming the frame of a beautiful picture; and the picture was that of a fair-haired and graceful young creature of eighteen, in a costume of pearly grey touched here and there with lines of blue, who regarded us with a winning expression of wonder and pity in her large and innocent eyes. Her appearance there seemed like a glimmer of sunlight shining through the rain; and a second or two elapsed before the Lieutenant could collect himself so far as to ask whether this angel of deliverance could not shelter us from the rude violence of the storm.

"We have no ostler," says the young lady, in a timid way.

"Have you any stables?" says the young man.

"Yes, we have stables—shall I show them to you?"

"No—no!" he cries, quite vehemently. "Don't you come out into the rain—not at all! I will find them out very well myself; but you must take in the ladies here, and get them dry."

And when we had consigned Bell and Tita to the care of the young lady, who received them with a look of much friendliness and concern in her pretty face, we went off and sought out the stables.

"Now, look here, my good friend," says Von Rosen; "we are both wet. The horses have to be groomed—that is very good work to dry one person; and so you go into the house, and change your clothes, and I will see after the horses, yes?"

"My young friend, it is no use your being very complaisant to me," I observe to him. "I don't mean to intercede with Bell for you."

"Would you intercede with that beautiful young lady of the inn for me? Well, now, that is a devil of a language, yours. How am I to address a girl who is a stranger to me, and to whom I wish to be respectful? I cannot call her Mademoiselle, which is only an old nickname that Mademoiselle used to have in Bonn, as you know. You tell me I cannot address a young lady as "Miss," without mentioning her other name, and I do not know it. Yet I cannot address her with nothing, as if she were a servant. Tell me now—what does an English gentleman say to a young lady whom he may assist at a railway station abroad, and does not know her name? And what, if he does not catch her name when he is introduced in a house? He cannot say Mademoiselle. He cannot say Fräulein. He cannot say Miss."

"He says nothing at all."

"But that is rudeness—it is awkward to you not to be able to address her."

"Why are you so anxious to know how to talk to this young lady?"

"Because I mean to ask her if it is impossible that she can get a little corn for the horses."

It was tiresome work—that getting the horses out of the wet harness, and grooming them without the implements of grooming. Moreover, we could find nothing but a handful of hay; and it was fortunate that the nosebags we had with us still contained a small allowance of oats and beans.

What a comfortable little family-party, however, we made up in the large warm kitchen! Tita had struck up a great friendship with the gentle and pretty daughter of the house; the old lady, her mother, was busy in having our wraps and rugs hung up to dry before the capacious fireplace; and the servant-maid had begun to cook some chops for us. Bell, too—who might have figured as the elder sister of this flaxen-haired and frank-eyed creature, who had appeared to us in the storm—was greatly interested in her; and was much pleased to hear her distinctly and proudly claim to be Scotch, although it was her misfortune to live a short distance on the wrong side of the Border. And with that the two girls fell to talking about Scotch and Cumbrian words; but here Bell had a tremendous advantage, and pushed it to such an extreme, that her opponent, with a pretty blush and a laugh, said that she did not know the English young ladies knew so much of Scotch. And when Bell protested that she would not be called English, the girl only stared. You see, she had never had the benefit of hearing the Lieutenant discourse on the history of Strathclyde.

Well, we had our chops and what not in the parlour of the inn; but it was remarkable how soon the Lieutenant proposed that we should return to the kitchen. He pretended that he was anxious to learn Scotch; and affected a profound surprise that the young lady of the inn should not know the meaning of the word "spurtle." When we went into the kitchen, however, it was to the mamma that he addressed himself chiefly; and behold! she speedily revealed to the

young soldier that she was the widow of one of the Gretna priests. More than that I don't mean to say. Some of you young fellows who may read this might perhaps like to know the name and the precise whereabouts of the fair wild-flower that we found blooming up in these remote solitudes; but neither shall be revealed. If there was any of us who fell in love with the sweet and gentle face, it was Queen Tita; and I know not what compacts about photographs may not have been made between the two women.

Meanwhile the Lieutenant had established himself as a great favourite with the elderly lady, and by and by she left the kitchen, and came back with a sheet of paper in her hand, which she presented to him. It turned out to be one of the forms of the marriage-certificates used by her husband in former days; and for curiosity's sake I append it below, suppressing the name of the priest for obvious reasons.

KINGDOM OF SCOTLAND.

COUNTY OF DUMFRIES.

Parish of Gretna.

**These are to Certify** *to all whom these presents shall come, that * * * from the parish of * * * in the County of * * * and * * * from the parish of * * * in the County of * * * being now here present, and having declared themselves single persons, were this day Married after the manner of the Laws of the Church of England, and agreeable to the Laws of Scotland; as Witness our hands, Allison's Bank Toll-house, this * * * day of * * * 18 .*

*Before * * ** { _____
_____

Witnesses, { _____
_____

"That is a dangerous paper to carry about wi' ye," said the old woman, with a smile.

"Why so?" inquired the Lieutenant.

"Because ye might be tempted to ask a young leddy to sign her name there;" and what should prevent that innocent-eyed girl turning just at this moment to look with a pleased smile at our Bell? The Lieutenant laughed, in an embarrassed way, and said the rugs might as well be taken from before the fire, as they were quite dry now.

I think none of us would have been sorry to have stayed the night in this homely and comfortable little inn, but we wished to get on to Lockerbie, so as to reach Edinburgh in other two days. Moreover, the clouds had broken, and there was a pale glimmer of sunshine appearing over the dark green woods and meadows. We had the horses put into the phaeton again, and with many a friendly word of thanks to the good people who had been so kind to us, we started once more to cross the Border.

"And what do you think of the first Scotch family you have seen?" says Queen Tita to the Lieutenant, as we cross the bridge again.

"Madame," he says, quite earnestly, "I did dream for a moment I was in Germany again—everything so friendly and homely, and the young lady not too proud to wait on you, and help the servant in the cooking; and then, when that is over, to talk to you with good education, and intelligence, and great simpleness and frankness. Oh, that is very good—whether it is Scotch, or German, or any other country—the simple ways, and the friendliness, and the absence of all the fashions and the hypocrisy."

"That young lady was very fashionably dressed, Count von Rosen," says Tita with a smile.

"That is nothing, Madame. Did she not bring in to us our dinner, just as the daughter of the house in a German country inn would do, as a compliment to you, and not to let the servant come in? Is it debasement, do you think? No. You do respect her for it; and you yourself, Madame, you did speak to her as if she were an old friend of yours—and why not, when

you find people like that, honest and good-willing towards you?"

What demon of mischief was it that prompted Bell to sing that song as we drove through the darkening woods in this damp twilight? The Lieutenant had just got out her guitar for her when he was led into these fierce statements quoted above. And Bell with a great gravity, sang—

> "Farewell to Glenshalloch, a farewell for ever,
> Farewell to my wee cot that stands by the river;
> The fall is loud-sounding in voices that vary,
> And the echoes surrounding lament with my Mary."

This much may be said, that the name of the young lady of whom they had been speaking was also Mary; and the Lieutenant, divining some profound sarcasm in the song, began to laugh and protest that it was not because the girl was pretty and gentle that he had discovered so much excellence in the customs of Scotch households. Then Bell sang once more—as the sun went down behind the woods, and we heard the streams murmuring in deep valleys by the side of the road—

> "Hame, hame, hame, O hame fain would I be,
> Hame, hame, hame, to my ain countree;
> There's an eye that ever weeps, and a fair face will be fain,
> As I pass through Annan water, wi' my bonny bands again!"

We drive into the long village of Ecclefechan, and pause for a moment or two in front of the Bush Inn to let the horses have a draught of water and oatmeal. The Lieutenant, who has descended to look after this prescription, now comes out from the inn bearing a small tray with some tumblers on it.

"Madame," said he, "here is Scotch whisky—you must all drink it, for the good of the country."

"And of ourselves," says one of us, calling attention to the chill dampness of the night-air.

My Lady pleaded for a bit of sugar, but that was not allowed; and when she had been induced to take about a third of the Lieutenant's preparation, she put down the glass with an air of having done her duty.

As for Bell, she drank pretty nearly half the quantity; and the chances are that if the Lieutenant had handed her prussic acid, she would have felt herself bound, as a compliment, to accept it.

Darker and darker grew the landscape as we drove through the thick woods. And when, at last, we got into Lockerbie there was scarcely enough light of any sort to show us that the town, like most Scotch country towns and villages, was whitewashed. In the inn at which we stopped, appropriately named the Blue Bell, the Lieutenant once more remarked on the exceeding homeliness and friendliness of the Scotch. The landlord simply adopted us, and gave us advice in a grave, paternal fashion, about what we should have for supper. The waiter who attended us took quite a friendly interest in our trip; and said he would himself go and see that the horses which had accomplished such a feat were being properly looked after. Bell was immensely proud that she could understand one or two phrases that were rather obscure to the rest of the party; and the Lieutenant still further delighted her by declaring that he wished we could travel for months through this friendly land, which reminded him of his own country. Perhaps the inquisitive reader, having learned that we drank Scotch whisky at the Bush Inn of Ecclefechan, would like to know what we drank at the Blue Bell of Lockerbie. He may address a letter to Queen Titania on that subject, and he will doubtless receive a perfectly frank answer.

[*Note by Queen Titania.*—"I do not see why our pretty Bell should be made the chief subject of all the foregoing revelations. I will say this, that she and myself were convinced that we never saw two men *more jealous of each other* than those two were in that inn near the Border. The old lady was *quite amused by it;* but I do not think the girl herself noticed it, for she is a very innocent and gentle young thing, and has probably had no experience of such *absurdities.* But I would like to ask who first mentioned that subject of photographs; and who proposed to send her a whole series of engravings; and who offered to send her a volume of German songs. If Arthur had been there, we should have had the laugh all on our side; but now I suppose they will deny that anything of the kind took place—with the ordinary candour of gentlemen who are *found out.*"]

## CHAPTER XXX.

### TWEED SIDE.

"Ah, happy Lycius!—for she was a maid
More beautiful than ever twisted braid,
Or sighed, or blushed, or on spring-flowered lea
Spread a green kirtle to the minstrelsy;
A virgin purest-lipped, yet in the lore
Of love deep learned to the red heart's core."

THE very first object that we saw, on this the first morning of our waking in Scotland, was a small boy of seven or eight, brown-faced, yellow-haired, bare-footed, who was marching along in the sunlight with a bag of school-books on his back about as big as himself.

"Oh, the brave little fellow!" cries Tita, regarding him from the door of the inn with a great softness in her brown eyes. "Don't you think he will be Lord Chancellor some day?"

The future Lord Chancellor went steadily on, his small brown feet taking no heed of the stones in the white road.

"I think," says Tita, suddenly plunging her hand into her pocket, "I think I should like to give him a shilling."

"No, Madame," says one of us to her, sternly; "you shall not bring into this free land the corrupting influences of the south. It is enough that you have debased the district around your own home. If you offered that young patriot a shilling, he would turn again and rend you. But if you offered him a half-penny, now, to buy bools——"

At this moment, somehow or other, Bell and our Lieutenant appear together; and before we know where we are, the girl has darted across the street in pursuit of the boy.

"What are bools?" asked the Lieutenant gravely.

"Objects of interest to the youthful student."

THE FUTURE LORD CHANCELLOR. P. 396.

Then we see, in the white glare of the sun, a wistful, small, fair and sunburned face turned towards that young lady with the voluminous light brown hair. She is apparently talking to him, but in a different tongue from his own, and he looks frightened. Then the sunlight glitters on two white coins, and Bell pats him kindly on the shoulder; and doubtless the little fellow proceeds on his way to school in a sort of wild and wonderful dream, having an awful sense that he has been spoken to by a fair and gracious princess.

"As I live," says my Lady, with a great surprise, "she has given him two half-crowns!"

Queen Titania looks at me. There is a meaning in her look—partly interrogation, partly conviction, and wholly kind and pleasant. It has dawned upon her that girls who are not blessed with abundant pocket-money do not give away five shillings to a passing schoolboy without some profound emotional cause. Bell comes across the way, looking vastly pleased and proud, but somehow avoiding our eyes. She would have gone into the inn, but that my Lady's majestic presence (you could have fanned her out of the way with a butterfly's wing!) barred the entrance.

"Have you been for a walk this morning, Bell?" she says, with a fine air of indifference.

"Yes, Madame," replies our Uhlan—as if he had any business to answer for our Bell.

"Where did you go?"

"Oh," says the girl with some confusion, "we went—we went away from the town a little way—I don't exactly know——"

And with that she escaped into the inn.

"Madame," says the Lieutenant, with a great apparent effort, while he keeps his eyes looking towards the pavement, and there is a brief touch of extra colour in his brown face, "Madame—I—I am asked—indeed, Mademoiselle she was good enough—she is to be my wife—and she did ask me if I would tell you——"

And somehow he put out his hand—just as a German boy shakes hands with you, in a timid fashion, after you have tipped him at school—and took Tita's hand in his, as if to thank her for a great gift. And the little woman was so touched, and so mightily pleased, that I thought she would have kissed him before my very face, in the open streets of Lockerbie. All this scene, you must remember, took place on the doorstep of an odd little inn in a small Scotch country-town. There were few spectators. The sun was shining down on the white fronts of the cottages, and blinking on the windows. A cart of hay stood opposite to us, with the horse slowly munching inside his nosebag. We ourselves were engaged in peacefully waiting for breakfast when the astounding news burst upon us.

"Oh, I am very glad, indeed, Count von Rosen," says Tita; and, sure enough, there was gladness written all over her face and in her eyes. And then in a minute she had sneaked away from us, and I knew she had gone away to seek Bell, and stroke her hair and put her arms round her neck, and say, "Oh, my dear," with a little sob of delight.

Well, I turn to the Lieutenant. Young men, when they have been accepted, wear a most annoying air of self-satisfaction.

"Touching those settlements," I say to him; "have you any remark to make?"

The young man begins to laugh.

"It is no laughing matter. I am Bell's guardian. You have not got my consent yet."

"We can do without it—it is not an opera," he says, with some more of that insolent coolness. "But you would be pleased to prevent the marriage, yes? For I have seen it often—that you are more jealous of Mademoiselle than of anyone—and it is a wonder to me that you did not interfere before. But as for Madame, now—yes, she is my very good friend, and has helped me very much."

Such is the gratitude of those conceited young fellows, and their penetration, too! If he had but

known that only a few days before Tita had taken a solemn vow to help Arthur by every means in her power, so as to atone for any injustice she might have done him! But all at once he says, with quite a burst of eloquence (for him)—

"My dear friend, how am I to thank you for all this? I did not know when I proposed to come to England that this holiday tour would bring me so much happiness. It does appear to me I am grown very rich—so rich I should like to give something to everybody this morning—and make everyone happy as myself——"

"Just as Bell gave the boy five shillings. All right. When you get to Edinburgh you can buy Tita a Scotch collie—she is determined to have a collie, because Mrs. Quinet got a prize for one at the Crystal Palace. Come in to breakfast."

Bell was sitting there with her face in shadow, and Tita, laughing in a very affectionate way, standing beside her with her hands on the girl's shoulder. Bell did not look up; nothing was said. A very friendly waiter put breakfast on the table. The landlord dropped in to bid us good morning, and see that we were comfortable. Even the ostler, the Lieutenant told us afterwards, of this Scotch inn had conversed with him in a shrewd, homely, and sensible fashion, treating him as a young man who would naturally like to have the advice of his elders.

The young people were vastly delighted with the homely ways of this Scotch inn; and began to indulge in vague theories about parochial education, independence of character, and the hardihood of northern races —all tending to the honour and glory of Scotland. You would have thought, to hear them go on in this fashion, that all the good of the world, and all its beauty and kindliness, were concentrated in the Scotch town of Lockerbie, and that in Lockerbie no place was so much the pet of fortune as the Blue Bell Inn.

"And to think," says Bell, with a gentle regret, "that to-morrow is the last day of our driving."

"But not the last of our holiday, Mademoiselle," says the Lieutenant. "Is it necessary that any of us goes back to England for a week or two, or a month, or two months?"

Of course the pair of them would have liked very well to start off on another month's excursion, just as this one was finished. But parents and guardians have their duties. Very soon they would be in a position to control their own actions; and then they would be welcome to start for Kamschatka.

All that could be said in praise of Scotland had been said in the inn; and now, as Castor and Pollux took us away from Lockerbie into the hillier regions of Dumfries-shire, our young people were wholly at a loss for words to describe their delight. It was a glorious day, to begin with: a light breeze tempering the hot sunlight, and blowing about the perfume of sweet-briar from the fronts of the stone cottages, and bringing us warm and resinous odours from the woods of larch and spruce. We crossed deep glens, along the bottom of which ran clear brown streams over beds of pebbles. The warm light fell on the sides of those rocky clefts and lit up the masses of young rowan-trees and the luxuriant ferns along the moist banks. There was a richly cultivated and undulating country lying all around; but few houses, and those chiefly farmhouses. Far beyond, the rounded hills of Moffat rose soft and blue into the white sky. Then, in the stillness of the bright day, we came upon a wayside school; and as it happened to be dinner-time we stopped to see the stream of little ones come out. It was a pretty sight, under the shadow of the trees, to see that troop of children come into the country road—most of them being girls, in extremely white pinafores, and nearly all of them, boys and girls, being yellow-haired, clear-eyed, healthy children, who kept very silent and stared shyly at the horses and the phaeton. All the younger ones had bare feet, stained with the sun, and their yellow hair—which looked almost white by the side of their

berry-brown cheeks—was free from cap or bonnet. They did not say, "Chuck us a 'apenny." They did not raise a cheer as we drove off. They stood by the side of the road, close by the hawthorn hedge, looking timidly after us; and the last that we saw of them was that they had got into the middle of the path and were slowly going off home—a small, bright, and various-coloured group under the soft green twilight of an avenue of trees.

As we drove on through the clear, warm day, careless and content, the two women had all the talking to themselves; and a strange use they made of their opportunities. If the guardian angels of those two creatures happen to have any sense of humour, they must have laughed as they looked down and overheard. You may remember that when it was first proposed to take this Prussian Lieutenant with us on our summer tour, both Bell and my Lady professed the most deadly hatred of the German nation, and were nearly weeping tears over the desolate condition of France. That was about six months before. Now, thirty millions of people, either in the south or north of Europe, don't change their collective character—if such a thing exists—within the space of six months; but on this bright morning you would have fancied that the women were vying with each other to prove that all the domestic virtues, and all the science and learning of civilization, and all the arts that beautify life, were the exclusive property of the Teutons. My Lady was a later convert—had she not made merry only the other day over Bell's naïve confession that she thought the German nation as good as the French nation?—but now that she had gone over to the enemy, she altogether distanced Bell in the production of theories, facts, quotations, and downright personal opinion. She had lived a little longer, you see, and knew more; and perhaps she had a trifle more audacity in suppressing awkward facts. At all events the Lieutenant was partly abashed and partly amused by her warm

advocacy of German character, literature, music, and a thousand other things; and by her endeavours to prove—out of the historical lessons she had taught her two boys—that there had always prevailed in this country a strong antipathy to the French and all their ways.

"Their language too," I remark, to keep the ball rolling. "Observe the difference between the polished, fluent, and delicate German, and the barbaric dissonance and jumble of the French! How elegant the one, how harsh the other! If you were to take Bossuet, now——"

"It is not fair," says Bell. "We were talking quite seriously, and you come in to make a jest of it."

"I don't. Are you aware that, at a lecture Coleridge gave in the Royal Institution in 1808, he solemnly thanked his Maker that he did not know a word of *that frightful jargon, the French language?*"

The women were much impressed. They would not have dared, themselves, to say a word against the French language; nevertheless, Coleridge was a person of authority. Bell looked as if she would like to have some further opinions of this sort; but Mr. Freeman had not at that time uttered his epigram about the general resemblance of a Norman farmer to "a man of Yorkshire or Lincolnshire who has somehow picked up a bad habit of talking French," nor that other about a Dane who, "in his sojourn in Gaul, had put on a slight French varnish, and who came into England to be washed clean again."

"Now," I say to Bell, "if you had only civilly asked me to join in the argument, I could have given you all sorts of testimony to the worth of the Germans and the despicable nature of the French."

"Yes, to make the whole thing absurd," says Bell, somewhat hurt. "I don't think you believe anything seriously."

"Not in national characteristics even? If not in them, what are we to believe? But I will help you

all the same, Bell. Now, did you ever hear of a sonnet in which Wordsworth, after recalling some of the great names of the Commonwealth time, goes on to say—

> "'France, 'tis strange,
> Hath brought forth no such souls as we had then.
> Perpetual emptiness! unceasing change!
> No single volume paramount, no code,
> No master spirit, no determined road;
> But equally a want of books and men!

Does that please you?"

"Yes," says Bell, contentedly.

"Well, did you ever read a poem called "Hands all Round?"

"No."

"You never heard of a writer in the *Examiner* called 'Merlin,' whom people to this day maintain was the Poet Laureate of England?"

"No."

"Well, listen :—

> "'What health to France, if France be she
> Whom martial progress only charms?
> Yet tell her—better to be free
> Than vanquish all the world in arms.
> Her frantic city's flashing heats
> But fire, to blast, the hopes of men.
> Why change the titles of your streets?
> You fools, you'll want them all again.
> Hands all round!
> God the tyrant's cause confound!
> To France, the wiser France, we drink, my friends,
> And the great name of England, round and round!'

At that time, Miss Bell, thousands of people in this country were disquieted about the possible projects of the new French Government; and as it was considered that the Second Napoleon would seek to establish his power by the fame of foreign conquest——"

"This is quite a historical lecture," says Queen Tita, in an undertone.

"——and as the Napoleonic legend included the humiliation of England, many thoughtful men began to cast about for a possible ally with whom we could

take the field. To which country did they turn, do you think?"

"To Germany, of course," says Bell, in the most natural way in the world.

"Listen again:—

"Gigantic daughter of the West,
We drink to thee across the flood.
We know thee, and we love thee best,
For art thou not of British blood?
Should war's mad blast again be blown,
Permit not thou the tyrant powers
To fight thy mother here alone,
But let thy broadsides roar with ours.
Hands all round!
God the tyrant's cause confound!
To our dear kinsmen of the West, my friends,
And the great name of England, round and round!"

Bell seemed a little disappointed that America and not Germany had been singled out by the poet; but of course nations don't choose allies merely to please a girl who happens to have engaged herself to marry a Prussian officer.

"Now," I say to her, "you see what aid I might have given you, if you only had asked me prettily. But suppose we give Germany a turn now—suppose we search about for all the unpleasant things——"

"Oh no, please don't,' says Bell, submissively.

This piece of unfairness was so obvious and extreme that Von Rosen himself was at last goaded into taking up the cause of France, and even went the length of suggesting that peradventure ten righteous men might be found within the city of Paris. 'Twas a notable concession. I had begun to despair of France. But no sooner had the Lieutenant turned the tide in her favour than my Lady and Bell seemed graciously disposed to be generous. Chateaubriand was not Goethe, but he was a pleasing writer. Alfred de Musset was not Heine, but he had the merit of resembling him. If Auber did not exactly reach the position of a Beethoven or a Mozart, one had listened to worse operas than the "Crown Diamonds." The women did not know much about philosophy; but

while they were sure that all the learning and wisdom of the world had come from Germany, they allowed that France had produced a few epigrams. In this amiable frame of mind we drove along the white road on this summer day; and after having passed the great gap in the Moffat Hills which leads through to St. Mary's Loch and all the wonders of the Ettrick and the Yarrow, we drove into Moffat itself, and found ourselves in a large hotel fronting a great sunlit and empty square.

Our young people had really conducted themselves very discreetly. All that forenoon you would scarcely have imagined that they had just made a solemn promise to marry each other; but then they had been pretty much occupied with ancient and modern history. Now, as we entered a room in the hotel, the Lieutenant espied a number of flowers in a big glass vase; and without any pretence of concealment whatever, he walked up to it, selected a white rose, and brought it back to Bell.

"Mademoiselle," he said, in a low voice—but who could help hearing him?—"you did give to me, the other day, a forget-me-not; will you take this rose?"

Mademoiselle looked rather shy for a moment; but she took the rose, and—with an affectation of unconcern which did not conceal an extra touch of colour in her pretty face—she said, "Oh, thank you very much," and proceeded to put it into the bosom of her dress.

"Madame," said the Lieutenant, just as if nothing had occurred, "I suppose Moffat is a sort of Scotch Baden-Baden?"

Madame, in turn, smiled sedately, and looked out of the window, and said that she thought it was.

When we went out for a lounge after luncheon, we discovered that if Moffat is to be likened to Baden-Baden, it forms an exceedingly Scotch and respectable Baden-Baden. The building in which the mineral waters are drunk[1] looks somewhat like an educational

[1] "Bien entendu, d'ailleurs, que le but du voyage
Est de prendre les eaux; c'est un compte réglé.
D'eaux, je n'en ai point vu lorsque j'y suis allé [Mais

institution, painted white, and with prim white iron railings. Inside, instead of that splendid saloon of the Conversationshaus in which, amid a glare of gas, various characters, doubtful and otherwise, walk up and down and chat while their friends are losing five-franc pieces and napoleons in the adjoining chambers, we found a long and sober-looking reading-room. Moffat itself is a white, clean, wide-streeted place, and the hills around it are smooth and green; but it is very far removed from Baden-Baden. It is a good deal more proper, and a great deal more dull. Perhaps we did not visit it in the height of the season, if it has got a season; but we were at all events not very sorry to get away from it again, and out into the hilly country beyond.

That was a pretty drive up through Annandale. As you leave Moffat the road gradually ascends into the region of the hills; and down below you lies a great valley, with the river Annan running through it, and the town of Moffat itself getting smaller in the distance. You catch a glimmer of the blue peaks of Westmoreland lying far away in the south, half hid amid silver haze. The hills around you increase in size, and yet you would not recognize the bulk of the great round slopes but for those minute dots that you can make out to be sheep, and for an occasional wasp-like creature that you suppose to be a horse. The evening draws on. The yellow light on the slopes of green becomes warmer. You arrive at a great circular chasm which is called by the country-folks the Devil's Beef-tub—a mighty hollow, the western sides of which are steeped in a soft purple shadow, while the eastern slopes burn yellow in the sunlight. Far away down in that misty purple you can see tints of grey, and these are masses of slate uncovered by grass. The descent seems too abrupt for cattle, and yet there are faint

> "Mais qu'on ou puisse voir, je n'en mets rien en gage;
> Je crois même, en honneur, que l'eau de voisinage
> A, quand on l'examine, un petit goût salé."
>
> A. DE MUSSET.

specks which may be sheep. There is no house, not even a farmhouse, near; and all traces of Moffat and its neighbourhood have long been left out of sight.

But what is the solitude of this place to that of the wild and lofty region you enter when you reach the summits of the hills? Far away on every side of you stretch miles of lonely moorland, with the shoulders of more distant hills reaching down in endless succession into the western sky. There is no sign of life in this wild place. The stony road over which you drive was once a mail-coach road: now it is overgrown with grass. A few old stakes, rotten and tumbling, show where it was necessary at one time to place a protection against the sudden descents on the side of the road; but now the road itself seems lapsing back into moorland. It is up in this wilderness of heather and wet moss that the Tweed takes its rise; but we could hear no trickling of any stream to break the profound and melancholy stillness. There was not even a shepherd's hut visible; and we drove on in silence, scarcely daring to break the charm of the utter loneliness of the place.

The road twists round to the right. Before us a long valley is seen, and we guess that it receives the waters of the Tweed. Almost immediately afterwards we come upon a tiny rivulet some two feet in width—either the young Tweed itself or one of its various sources; and as we drive on in the gathering twilight towards the valley it seems as though we were accompanied by innumerable streamlets trickling down to the river. The fire of the sunset goes out in the west, but over there in the clear green-white of the east a range of hills still glows with a strange roseate purple. We hear the low murmuring of the Tweed in the silence of the valley. We get down among the lower-lying hills, and the neighbourhood of the river seems to have drawn to it thousands of wild creatures. There are plover calling and whirling over the marshy levels. There are black cock and grey hen dusting themselves in the road before us, and waiting until we are quite near to them before

they wing their straight flight up to the heaths above. Far over us, in the clear green of the sky, a brace of wild duck go swiftly past. A weasel glides out and over the grey stones by the roadside; and further along the bank there are young rabbits watching, and trotting and watching again, as the phaeton gets nearer to them. And then, as the deep rose purple of the eastern hills fades away, and all the dark green valley of the Tweed lies under the cold silver-grey of the twilight, we reach a small and solitary inn, and are almost surprised to hear once more the sound of a human voice.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### OUR EPILOGUE.

"Nor much it grieves
To die, when summer dies on the cold sward.
Why, I have been a butterfly, a lord
Of flowers, garlands, love-knots, silly posies,
Groves, meadows, melodies, and arbour-roses:
My kingdom's at its death."

WHEN you have dined on ham and eggs and whisky the evening before, to breakfast on ham and eggs and tea is a great relief the morning after. We gathered round the table in this remote little inn with much thankfulness of heart. We were to have a glorious day for the close of our journey. All round the Crook Inn there was a glare of sunshine on the rowan-trees. The soft greys and greens of the hills on the other side of the river rose into a pale-blue sky where there was not a single cloud. And then, to complete the picture of the moorland hostelry, appeared a keeper who had just set free from their kennel a lot of handsome setters, and the dogs were flying hither and thither along the white road and over the grass and weeds by the tall hedges.

"Do you know," said Bell, "that this used to be a posting-house that had thirty horses in its own stables; and now it is only used by a few sportsmen

who come here for the fishing and later on for the shooting?"

So she, too, had taken to getting up in the morning and acquiring information.

"Yes," she said, "but it has been taken by a new landlord, who hopes to have gentlemen come and lodge here by the month in the autumn."

She was beginning to show a great interest in the affairs of strangers: hitherto she had cared for none of these things, except where one of our Surrey pensioners was concerned.

"And the ostler is such an intelligent and independent old man, who lets you know that he understands horses a great deal better than you."

I could see that my Lady was mentally tracking out Bell's wanderings of the morning. Under whose tuition had she discovered all that about the landlord? Under whose guidance had she found herself talking to an ostler in the neighbourhood of the stables? But she had not devoted the whole morning to such inquiries. We remarked that the Lieutenant wore in his button-hole a small bouquet of tiny wild-flowers, the faint colours of which were most skilfully combined and shown up by a bit of fern placed behind them. You may be sure that it was not the clumsy fingers of the young Uhlan that had achieved that work of art.

"And now, my dear children," I observe, from the head of the table, "we have arrived at the last stage of our travels. We have done nothing that we ought to have done; we have done everything that we ought not to have done. As one of you has already pointed out, we have never visited a museum, or explored a ruin, or sought out a historical scene. Our very course has been inconsistent, abnormal, unreasonable—indeed, if one were to imagine a sheet of lightning getting tipsy and wandering over the country in a helpless fashion for several days, that might describe our route. We have had no adventures that could be called adventures, no experiences

to turn our hair grey in a dozen hours; only a general sense of light, and fresh air, and motion, and laughter. We have seen green fields, and blue skies, and silver lakes; we have seen bright mornings and breezy days, and spent comfortable evenings in comfortable inns. Shall we not look back upon this month in our lives, and call it the month of sunshine and green leaves?"

Here a tapping all round the table greeted the orator, and somewhat disconcerted him; but presently he proceeded:—

"If, at times, one member of our party, in the reckless exercise of a gift of repartee which heaven, for some inscrutable reason, has granted her, has put a needle or two into our couch of eider-down——"

"I pronounce this meeting dissolved," says Bell quickly, and with a resolute air.

"Yes, Mademoiselle," put in the Lieutenant. "It is dissolved. But as it breaks up—it is a solemn occasion—might we not drink one glass of champagne——"

Here a shout of laughter overwhelmed the young man. Champagne up in these wild moorlands of Peebles, where the youthful Tweed and its tributaries wander through an absolute solitude! The motion was negatived without a division; and then we went out to look after Castor and Pollux.

All that forenoon we were chased by a cloud as we drove down the valley of the Tweed. Around us there was abundant sunlight—falling on the grey bed of the river, the brown water, the green banks and hills beyond; but down in the southwest was a great mass of cloud which came slowly advancing with its gloom. Here we were still in the brightness of the yellow glare, with a cool breeze stirring the rowan-trees and the tall weeds by the side of the river. Then, as we got further down the valley, the bed of the stream grew broader. There were great banks of grey pebbles visible, and the brown water running in shallow channels between, where the stones fretted its surface, and caused a murmur that seemed to fill the silence of the smooth

hills around. Here and there a solitary fisherman was visible, standing in the river and persistently whipping the stream with his supple fly-rod. A few cottages began to appear, at considerable intervals. But we came to no village; and as for an inn, we never expected to see one. We drove leisurely along the now level road, through a country rich with waving fields of grain, and dotted here and there with comfortable-looking farmhouses.

Then Bell sang to us:—

"Upon a time I chanced
To walk along the green,
Where pretty lasses danced
In strife, to choose a queen;
Some homely dressed, some handsome,
Some pretty and some gay,
But who excelled in dancing
Must be the Queen of May."

But when she had sung the last verse—

"Then all the rest in sorrow,
And she in sweet content,
Gave over till the morrow,
And homewards straight they went.
But she, of all the rest,
Was hindered by the way,
For every youth that met her
Must kiss the Queen of May,"—

my Lady said it was very pretty, only why did Bell sing an English song after she had been trying to persuade us that she held the English and their music in contempt?

"Now, did I ever say anything like that?" said Bell, turning in an injured way to the Lieutenant.

"No," says he, boldly. If she had asked him to swear that two and two were seven, he would have said that the man was a paralyzed imbecile who did not know it already.

"But I will sing you a Scotch song, if you please," says Bell, shrewdly suspecting that that was the object of Tita's protest.

"Will ye gang to the Hielands, Leezie Lindsay?"

—this was what Bell sang now—

"Will ye gang to the Hielands wi' me?
Will ye gang to the Hielands, Leezie Lindsay,
My pride and my darling to be?"

"To gang to the Hielands wi' you, sir,
I dinna ken how that may be;
For I ken nae the land that you live in,
Nor ken I the lad I'm gaun wi'."

And so forth to the end, where the young lady "kilts up her coats o' green satin," and is off with Lord Ronald Macdonald. Probably the Lieutenant meant only to show that he knew the meaning of the word "Hielands;" but when he said—

"And we do go to the Highlands, yes?" the girl was greatly taken aback. It seemed as though he were coolly placing himself and her in the position of the hero and heroine of the song; and my Lady smiled, and Bell got confused, and the Lieutenant, not knowing what was the matter, stared, and then turned to me to repeat the question. By this time Bell had recovered herself, and she answered hastily—

"Oh yes, we shall go to the Highlands, shall we not?—to the Trossachs, and Ben Nevis, and Auchenasheen——"

"And Orkney too, Bell? Do you know the wild proposal you are making in laying out plans for another month's holiday?"

"And why not?" says the Lieutenant. "It is only a pretence, this talk of much work. You shall send the horses and phaeton back by the rail from Edinburgh; then you are free to go away anywhere for another month. Is it not so, Madame?"

Madame is silent. She knows that she has only to say "yes" to have the thing settled; but thoughts of home and the cares of that pauperized parish crowd in upon her mind.

"I suppose we shall get letters from the boys to-night, when we reach Edinburgh. There will be letters from home, too, saying whether everything is right down there. There may be no reason for going back at once."

She was evidently yielding. Was it that she wanted to give those young people the chance of a summer ramble which they would remember for the rest of their life? The prospect lent a kindly look to her face; and, indeed, the whole of them looked so exceedingly happy, and so dangerously forgetful of the graver aspects of life, that it was thought desirable to ask them whether there might not be a message from Arthur among the batch of letters awaiting us in Edinburgh.

'Twas a random stroke, but it struck home. The conscience of these careless people was touched. They knew in their inmost hearts that they had wholly forgotten that unhappy young man whom they had sent back to Twickenham with all his faith in human nature destroyed for ever. But was it pity for him that now filled their faces, or a vague dread that Arthur might, in the last extremity of his madness, have gone up to Edinburgh by rail to meet us there?

"He promised us an important communication," says my Lady.

She would not say that it was understood to refer to his marriage; but that was the impression he had left. Very probably, too, she was haunted by speculations as to how such a marriage, if it took place, would turn out; and whether little Katty Tatham would be able to reconcile Arthur to his lot, and convince him that he was very fortunate in not having married that faithless Bell.

"Madame," said the Lieutenant, suddenly—he did not care to have that pitiful fellow Arthur receive so much consideration—"this is a very sober country. Shall we never come to an inn? The champagne I spoke of, that has gone away as a dream; but on this warm day a little lemonade and a little whisky—that would do to drink the health of our last drive, yes! But there is no inn—nothing but those fields of corn, and farmhouses."

At last, however, we came to a village. The Lieutenant proposed to pull up and give Castor and Pollux a mouthful of water and oatmeal—it was always

Castor and Pollux that were supposed to be thirsty. But what was his amazement to find that in the village there was no inn of any kind!

"I wish there were some villages of this sort down in our part of the country," says Queen Tita, with a sigh. "With us, they build the public-house first, and that draws other houses."

And with that Bell began to relate to the Lieutenant how my Lady was once vexed beyond measure to find—just as she was coming out of an obscure public-house on a Sunday morning, after having compelled the tipsy and quarrelling landlord thereof to beg forgiveness of his wife—a whole group of visitors at the Squire's house coming along the road from church, and staring at her as if she had gone into the public for refreshment. It was a vastly interesting story, perhaps; but the sulky young man paid little heed to it. He wore an injured look. He kept looking far ahead along the road; and, although it was a very pretty road, he did not seem satisfied. At length he pulled the horses up, and hailed a farmer who, in his white shirt-sleeves, was working in a field close by, along with a domestic group of fellow-labourers.

"I say," called out the Lieutenant, "isn't there an inn on this road?"

"Ay, that there is," said the man, with a grim smile, as he rose up and drew his sleeve across his forehead.

"How far yet?"

"Twa miles. It's a temperance hoose!"

"A temperance hoose," said the Lieutenant to Bell; "what is a temperance hoose?"

"They don't sell any spirits there, or beer, or wine."

"And is that what is called temperance?" said the Lieutenant, in a peevish way; and then he called out again, "Look here, my good friend, when do we come to a proper kind of inn?"

"There is an inn at Ledburn—that's eight miles on."

"Eight miles! And where was the last one we passed?"

"Well, that maun be about seven miles back."

"Thank you. It is healthy for you, perhaps, but how you can live in a place where there is no public-house not for fifteen miles—well, it is a wonder. Good day to you!"

"Gude day, sir!" said the farmer, with a broad, good-humoured laugh on his face; the Lieutenant was obviously not the first thirsty soul who had complained of the scarcity of inns in these parts.

"These poor horses," growled the Lieutenant as we drove on. "It is the hottest day we have had. The clouds have gone away, and we have beaten in the race. And other eight miles in this heat——"

He would probably have gone on compassionating the horses, but that he caught a glimpse of Bell demurely smiling, and then he said—

"Ha, you think I speak for myself, Mademoiselle? That also, for when you give your horses water, you should drink yourself always, for the good of the inn. But now that we can get nothing, Madame, shall we imagine it, yes? What we shall drink at the Ledburn inn? Have you tried, on a hot day, this—one glass of sparkling hock poured into a tumbler, then a bottle of seltzer water, then three drops of Angostura bitters, and a lump of ice? That is very good; and this too—you put a glass of pale sherry in the tumbler, then a little lemon juice——"

"Please, Count von Rosen, may I put it down in my note-book?" says Tita, hurriedly. "You know I have your recipe for a luncheon. Wouldn't these do for it?"

"Yes, and for you!" says a third voice. "What madness has seized you, to talk of ice and hock in connection with Ledburn? If you get decent Scotch whisky and ham and eggs for luncheon, you may consider yourselves well off."

"I am a little tired of that sort of banquet," says my Lady, with a gentle look of resignation. "Couldn't we drive on to Edinburgh?"

But for the sake of the horses, we should all have been glad to do that; for the appearance of this

Ledburn inn, when we got to it, impressed us with awe and terror. 'Tis a cutthroat-looking place. The dingy dilapidated building stands at the parting of two roads; the doors were shut as we drove up to it, there was no one about of whom we could ask a question. It looked the sort of place for travellers to reach at dead of night, and become the subject of one or other of the sombre adventures which are associated with remote and gloomy inns in the annals of romance. When we did get hold of the landlord, his appearance was not prepossessing. He was a taciturn and surly person. There was apparently no ostler, and he helped Von Rosen to take the horses out of the phaeton, but he did so in a fashion which awoke the ire of the Lieutenant to a serious degree, and some sharp words were being bandied about when I drove the women into the inn.

"That is a dreadful person," said my Lady.

"Why? He has become morose in this solitary inn, that is all. If you were shut up here for a few years, what would you become?"

We had ham and eggs and whisky in a dingy little chamber upstairs. The women would touch nothing —notwithstanding that the Lieutenant came in to announce that the shoe of one of the horses had got loose, and that a smith would have to be sent for from some distance off. Moreover, when the smith did come, it was found that our ingenious landlord had not informed him what was required of him, and consequently he had brought no tools. Should we send the horse back with him, or would he despatch a boy for his tools?

"How many miles is it to Edinburgh?" says my Lady.

"About a dozen, I should think."

"We couldn't walk that, do you think?" she says to Bell, with a doubtful air.

Bell could walk it very well, I know; but she regards her companion for a moment, and says—

"We must not try."

Looking at this fix, and at the annoyance the women

experienced in being detained in this inhospitable hostelry, that young Prussian got dreadfully enraged. He was all the more wroth that there was no one on whom he could reasonably vent his anger; and, in fact, it was a most fortunate thing for our host that he had at last condescended to be a little more civil. The Lieutenant came up into the room, and proposed that we should play at bézique. Impossible. Or would Mademoiselle care to have the guitar taken out? Mademoiselle would prefer to have it remain where it was. And at length we went outside and sat in the yard, or prowled along the uninteresting road, until the smith arrived, and then we had the horses put in and set out upon the last stage of our journey.

We drove on in the deepening sunset. The ranges of the Pentland Hills on our left were growing darker, and the wild moorland country around was getting to be of a deeper and deeper purple. Sometimes, from the higher portions of the road, we caught a glimpse of Arthur's Seat, and in the whiter sky of the north-east it lay there like a pale-blue cloud. We passed through Pennycuick, picturesquely placed along the wooded banks of the North Esk. But we were driving leisurely enough along the level road, for the horses had done a good day's work, and there still remained a few miles before they had earned their rest.

Was it because we were driving near a great city that Von Rosen somewhat abruptly asked my Lady what was the best part of London to live in? The question was an odd one for a young man. Bell pretended not to hear—she was busy with the reins. Whereupon Tita began to converse with her companion on the troubles of taking a house, and how your friends would inevitably wonder how you could have chosen such a neighbourhood instead of their neighbourhood, and assure you, with much compassion, that you had paid far too much for it.

"And as for Pimlico," I say to him, "you can't live there; the sight of its stucco would kill you in a month. And as for Brompton, you can't live there;

it lies a hundred feet below the level of the Thames. And as for South Kensington, you can't live there; it is a huddled mass of mews. And as for Belgravia or Mayfair, you can't live there; for you could not pay the rent of a good house, and the bad houses are in slums. Paddington?—a thousand miles from a theatre. Hampstead?—good-bye to your friends. Bloomsbury?—the dulness of it will send you to an early grave. Islington?—you will acquire a Scotch accent in a fortnight. Clapham?—you will become a Dissenter. Denmark Hill?—they will exclude you from all the fashionable directories. Brixton?—the 'endless meal of brick' will drive you mad. But then it is true that Pimlico is the best-drained part of London. And Brompton has the most beautiful old gardens. And South Kensington brings you close to all sorts of artistic treasures. And Hampstead has a healthy situation. And Mayfair is close to the Park. And Clapham is close to several commons, and offers you excellent drives. And Denmark Hill is buried in trees, and you descend from it into meadows and country lanes. And Islington is celebrated for possessing the prettiest girls in the world. And Brixton has a gravelly soil—so that you see, looking at all these considerations, you will have no difficulty whatever in deciding where you ought to live."

"I think," said the young man, gravely, "the easiest way of choosing a house in London is to take one in the country."

"Oh, do live in the country!" exclaims Tita, with much anxiety. "You can go so easily up to London and take rooms about Bond Street or in Half-moon Street, if you wish to see pictures or theatres. And what part of the country near London could you get prettier than down by Leatherhead?"

Bell is not appealed to. She will not hear. She pretends to be desperately concerned about the horses. And so the discussion is postponed, *sine die*, until the evening; and in the gathering darkness we approach Edinburgh.

How long the way seemed on this the last night of our driving! The clear twilight faded away; and the skies overhead began to show faint throbbings of the stars. A pale yellow glow on the horizon told us where the lights of Edinburgh were afire. The road grew almost indistinguishable; but overhead the great worlds became more visible in the deep vault of blue. In a perfect silence we drove along the still highway, between the dark hedges; and clearer and more clear became the white constellations, trembling in the dark. What was my Lady thinking of—of Arthur, or her boys at Twickenham, or of long-forgotten days at Eastbourne—as she looked up at all the wonders of the night? There lay King Charles's Wain as we had often regarded it from a boat at sea, as we lay idly on the lapping waves. The jewels on Cassiopeia's chair glimmered faint and pale; and all the brilliant stars of the Dragon's hide trembled in the dark. The one bright star of the Swan recalled many an evening in the olden times; and here, nearer at hand, Capella shone, and there Cepheus looked over to the pole-star as from the distance of another universe. Somehow it seemed to us that under the great and throbbing vault the sea ought to be lying clear and dark; but these were other masses we saw before us, where the crags of Arthur's Seat rose sharp and black into the sky. We ran in almost under the shadow of that silent mass of hill. We drew nearer to the town; and then we saw before us long and waving lines of red fire—the gas-lamps of a mighty street. We left the majesty of the night outside, and were soon in the heart of the great city. Our journey was at an end.

But when the horses had been consigned to their stables, and all arrangements made for their transference next day to London, we sat down at the window of a Princes Street Hotel. The tables behind were inviting enough. Our evening meal had been ordered, and at length the Lieutenant had the wish of his heart in procuring the Schaumwein with which to drink to the good health of our good horses that had brought us so far. But what in all the journey was there to equal

the magic sight that lay before us as we turned to these big panes? Beyond a gulf of blackness, the old town of Edinburgh rose with a thousand points of fire into the clear sky of a summer night. The tall houses, with their eight or nine stories, had their innumerable windows ablaze; and the points of orange light shone in the still blue shadow until they seemed to form part of some splendid and enchanted palace built on the slopes of a lofty hill. And then beyond that we could see the great crags of the Castle looming dark in the starlight, and we knew, rather than saw, that there were walls and turrets up there, cold and distant, looking down on the yellow glare of the city beneath. What was Cologne with the coloured lamps of its steamers—as you see them cross the yellow waters of the Rhine when a full moon shines over the houses of Deutz—or what was Prague with its countless spires piercing the starlight and its great bridge crossing over to the wooded heights of the Hradschin—compared to this magnificent spectacle in the noblest city of the world? The lights of the distant houses went out one by one. The streets became silent. Even the stars grew paler; but why was that? A faint light, golden and soft, began to steal along the Castle-hill; and the slow, mild radiance touched the sharp slopes, the trees, and the great grey walls above, which were under the stars.

"Oh, my dear," says Tita, quite gently, to Bell, "we have seen nothing like that, not even in your own country of the Lakes!"

[*Note by Queen Titania.*—"It seems they have put upon me the responsibility of saying *the last word*, which is not quite fair. In the old comedies it was always the *heroine* of the piece who came forward to the footlights, and in her prettiest way spoke the epilogue; and of course the heroine was always young and nice-looking. If *Bell* would only do that, now, I am sure you would be pleased; but she is afraid to appear in public. *As for myself*, I don't know what to say. Count von Rosen suggests that I should copy some of the ancient authors and merely say 'Farewell, and clap your hands;' but very likely that is a joke—for who can tell when gentlemen *intend to be amusing?*—and perhaps they never said anything so foolish. But, as you are not to be addressed by the heroine of the piece, perhaps, considering my age

—*which I am seldom allowed to forget*—perhaps a word of advice may be permitted. And that is to the ladies and gentlemen who always go abroad and spend a great deal of time and money in hiring carriages to drive them in foreign parts. Of course everyone ought to go abroad; but why every year! I am sure I am not *prejudiced*, and I never enjoyed any tour abroad so much as this one through England. I do consider England (and of course you must include Scotland and Ireland) *the most beautiful country in the world.* I have never been to America; but that does not matter. It *cannot be* more beautiful than England. If it is, so much the better, but I for one am quite satisfied with England; and as for the old-fashioned and quaint places you meet on a driving tour such as this, I am sure the American ladies and gentlemen whom I have met have always admitted to me that they were *delightful.* Well, that is all. I shall say nothing about our young friends, for I think *sufficient revelations* have been made in the foregoing pages. Arthur has only been to see us once since our return, and of course we could not ask him the reason of his getting married *so unexpectedly*, for Katty was with him, and very pleased and happy she looked. Arthur was very civil to our Bell; which shows that his marriage has improved him *in one respect;* but he was a little cold and distant at the same time. The poor girl was dreadfully frightened; but she made herself very friendly to him, and kissed little Katty in the *most affectionate* manner when they were going away. Luckily, perhaps, Lieutenant von Rosen was up in London; but when he came down next day, Bell had a great deal to tell him in private; and the result of the conversation—of which we *elderly folks*, of course, are not permitted to know anything—seemed to be very pleasing to them both. Then there was a talk between my husband and him in the evening about a loose-box in certain stables. Bell came and put her arm round my waist, and besought me *very prettily* to tell her what were the nicest colours for a drawing-room. It seems there is some house, about a couple of miles from here, which they have visited; but I am not going to tell you any more. As our Bell is too shy to come forward, I suppose I must say good-bye for her, and thank you *very much indeed* for coming with us so far on such a long and round-about journey.—T."]

THE END.

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